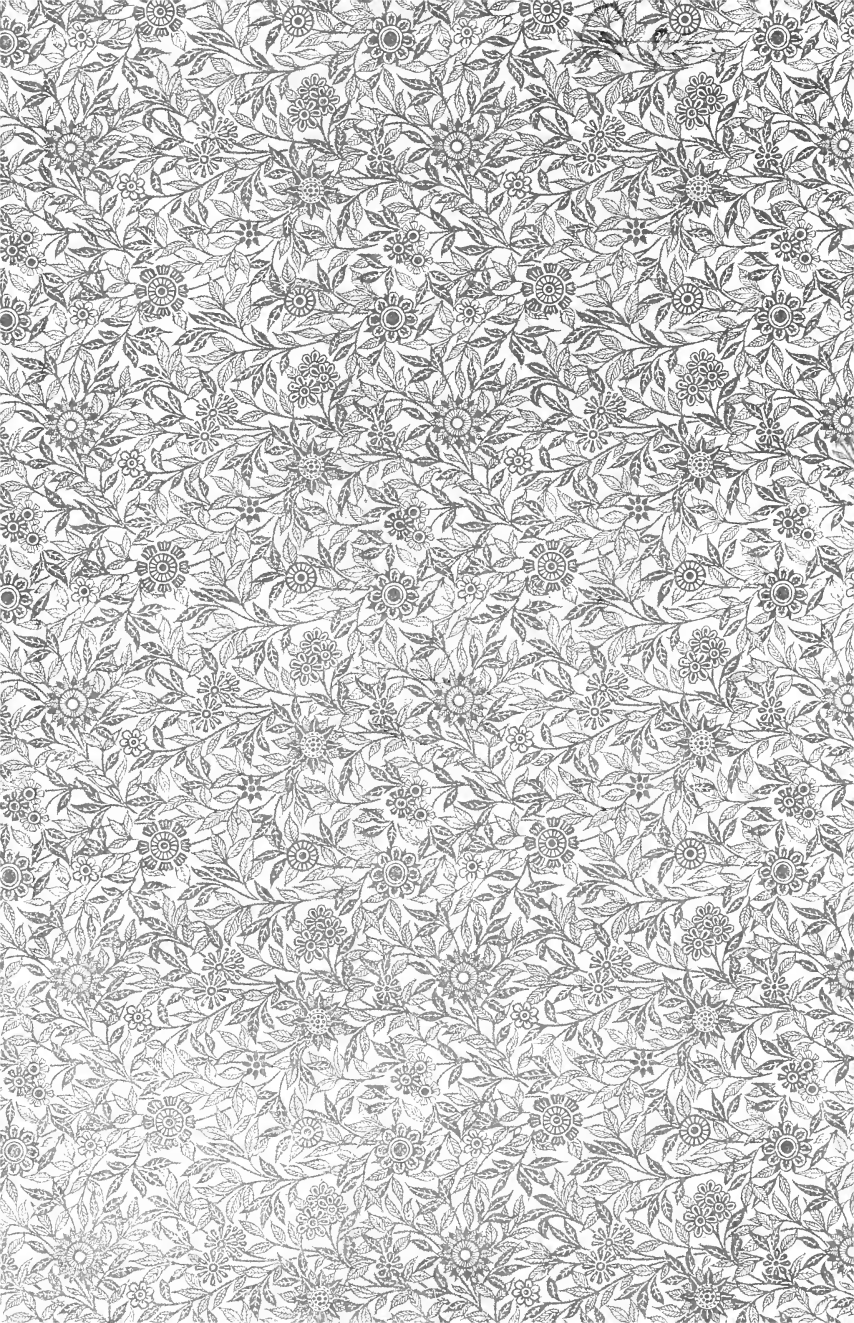
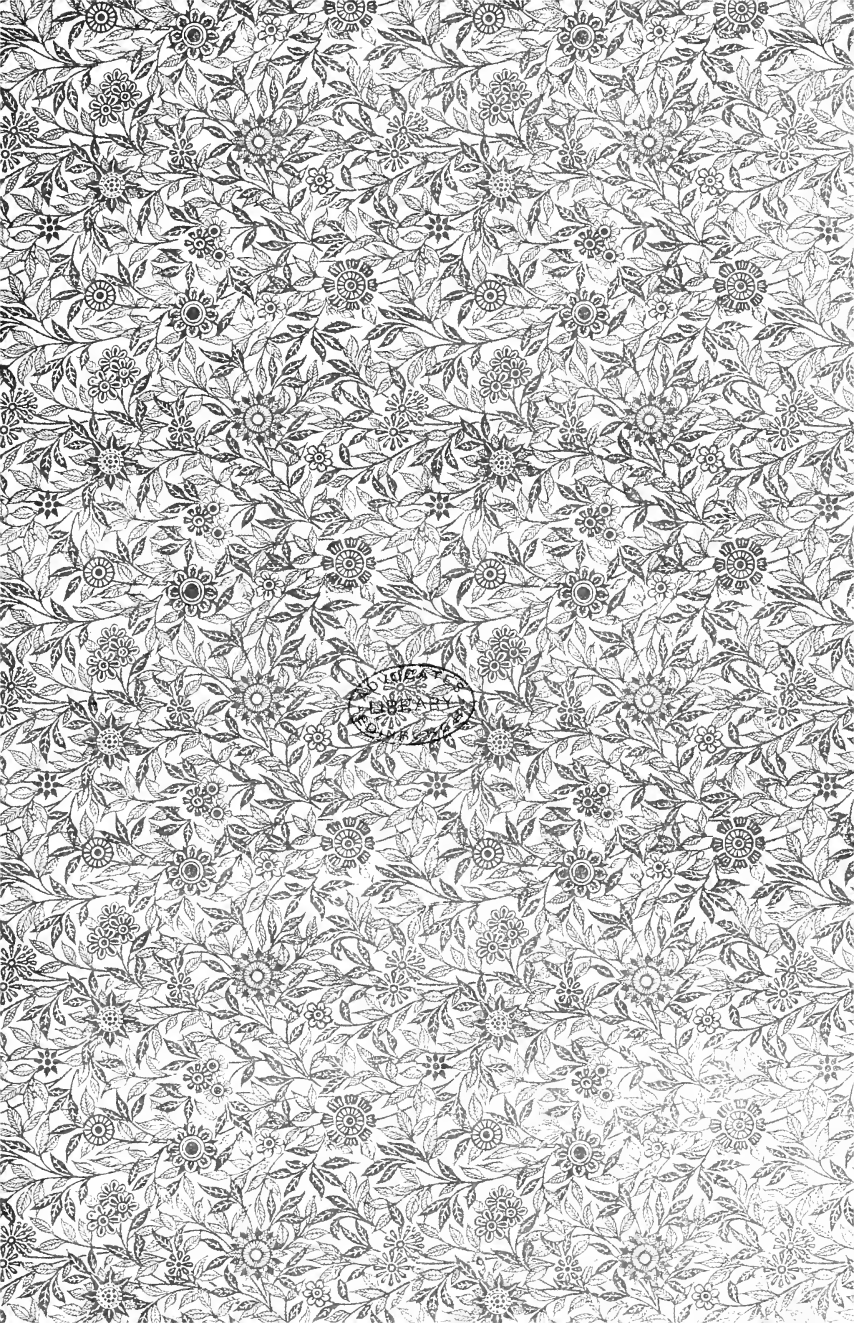


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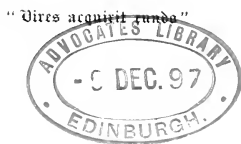
Home Again



THE
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MAGAZINE

EDITED BY
LORD FREDERIC HAMILTON

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THE ADVENTURES OF A FRENCH PRISONER IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER XXXI.

EVENTS OF THURSDAY: THE ASSEMBLY BALL.

BUT I awoke to the chill reminder of dawn, and found myself no master even of cheerless mirth. I had supped with the *Senatus Academicus* of Cramond: so much my head informed me. It was Thursday, the day of the Assembly Ball. But the ball was fixed by the card for 8 p.m., and I had, therefore, twelve mortal hours to wear through as best I could. Doubtless it was this reflection which prompted me to leap out of bed instanter and ring for Mr. Rowley and my shaving water.

Mr. Rowley, it appeared, was in no such hurry. I tugged a second time at the bell-rope. A groan answered me: and there in the doorway stood, or rather titubated, my paragon of body-servants. He was collarless, unkempt; his face a tinted map of shame and bodily disorder. His hand shook on the hot-water can, and spilled its contents into his shoes. I opened on him with a tirade, but had no heart to continue. The fault, after all, was mine; and it argued something like heroism in the lad that he had fought his nausea down and come up to time.

"But not smiling," I assured him.

"Oh, please, Mr. Anne. Go on, sir; I deserve it. But I'll never do it again, strike me sky-blue scarlet!"

"In so far as that differed from your present colouring, I believe," said I, "it would be an improvement."

"Never again, Mr. Anne."

"Certainly not, Rowley. Even to good men this may happen once: beyond that, carelessness shades off into depravity."

"Yessir."

"You gave a good deal of trouble last night. I have yet to meet Mrs. McRankine."

"As for that, Mr. Anne," said he, with an incongruous twinkle in his bloodshot eye, "she've been up with a tray: dry toast and a pot of tea. The old gal's bark is worse than her bite, sir, begging your pardon and meaning as she's a decent one, she is."

"I was fearing that might be just the trouble," I answered.

One thing was certain. Rowley, that morning, should not be entrusted with a razor and the handling of my chin. I sent him back to his bed, with orders not to rise from it without permission; and went about my toilette deliberately. In spite of the lad, I did not enjoy the prospect of Mrs. McRankine.

I enjoyed it so little, indeed, that I fell to poking the sitting-room fire when she entered with the *Mercury*; and read the *Mercury* assiduously while she brought in breakfast. She set down the tray with a slam and stood beside it, her hands on her hips, her whole attitude breathing challenge.

"Well, Mrs. McRankine?" I began, upturning a hypocritical eye from the newspaper.

"'Well,' is it? Nhm!"

I lifted the breakfast cover, and saw before me a damnatory red herring.

"Rowley was very foolish last night," I remarked, with a discriminating stress on the name.

"'The ass knoweth his master's crib.'" She pointed to the herring. "It's all ye'll get, Mr.—Ducie, if that's your name."

"Madam"—I held out the fish at the end of my fork—"you drag it across the track of an apology." I set it back on the dish and replaced the cover. "It is clear that you wish us gone. Well and good: grant Rowley a day for recovery, and to-morrow you shall be quit of us." I reached for my hat.

"Whaur are ye gaun?"

"To seek other lodgings."

"I'll no say—— Man, man! have a care! And me beat to close an eye the nicht!" She dropped into a chair. "Nay, Mr. Ducie, ye daurna! Think o' that innocent lamb!"

"That little pig."

"He's ower young to die," sobbed my landlady.

"In the abstract I agree with you: but I am not aware that Rowley's death is required. Say rather that he is over young to turn King's evidence." I stepped back from the door. "Mrs. McRankine," I said, "I believe you to be soft-hearted. I know you to be curious. You will be pleased to sit perfectly still and listen to me."

And, resuming my seat, I leaned across the corner of the table and put my case before her without suppression or extenuation. Her breathing tightened over my sketch of the duel with Goguelat; and again more sharply as I told of my descent of the rock. Of Alain she said, "I ken his sort," and of Flora twice, "I'm wonderin' will I have seen her?" For the rest, she heard me out in silence, and rose and walked to the door without a word. There she turned. "It's a verra queer tale. If McRankine had told me the like, I'd have gien him the lie to his face."

Two minutes later I heard the vials of her speech unsealed above stairs, with detonations that shook the house. I had touched off my rocket, and the stick descended—on the prostrate Rowley.

And now I must face the inert hours. I sat down, and read my way through the *Mercury*. "The escaped French soldier, Champdivers, who is wanted in connection with the recent horrid murder at the Castle, remains at large——" the

rest but repeated the advertisement of Tuesday. "At large!" I set down the paper, and turned to my landlady's library. It consisted of Durham's *Physico- and Astro-Theology*, *The Scripture Doctrine of Original Sin*, by one Taylor, D.D., *The Ready Reckoner or Tradesman's Sure Guide*, and *The Path to the Pit delineated, with Twelve Engravings on Copper-plate*. For distraction I fell to pacing the room, and rehearsing those remembered tags of Latin verse concerning which M. de Culemberg had long ago assured me, "My son, we know not when, but some day they will come back to you with solace if not with charm." Good man! My feet trod the carpet to Horace's *Alcaics*. "*Virtus recludens immeritis mori Cœlum*—h'm, h'm—*raro*—

*raro antecedentem scelestum
deseruit pede Pena claudo."*

I paused by the window. In this there was no indiscretion; for a cold drizzle washed the panes, and the warmth of the apartment dimmed their inner surface.

"*Pede Pena claudo*," my finger traced the words on the damp glass.

A sudden clamour of the street-door bell sent me skipping back to the fireplace with my heart in my mouth. Interminable minutes followed, and at length Mrs. McRankine entered with my ball-dress from the tailor's. I carried it into the next room, and disposed it on the bed—olive-green coat with gilt buttons, and facings of watered silk, olive-green pantaloons, white waistcoat sprigged with blue and green forget-me-nots. The survey carried me on to midday and the midday meal.

The ministry of meal-time is twice blest: for prisoners and men without appetite it punctuates and makes time of eternity. I dawdled over my chop and pint of brown stout until Mrs. McRankine, after twice entering to clear away, with the face of a Cumæan sibyl, so far relaxed the tension of unnatural calm as to inquire if I meant to be all night about it.

The afternoon wore into dusk; and with dusk she reappeared with a tea-tray. At six I retired to dress.

Behold me now issuing from my chamber, conscious of a well-fitting coat and a shapely pair of legs; the dignified simplicity of my *tournure* (simplicity so proper to the scion of an exiled house) relieved by a dandiacal hint of shirt-frill, and corrected into tenderness by the virgin waistcoat sprigged with forget-me-nots (for constancy), and buttoned with pink coral (for hope). Satisfied of the effect, I sought the apartment of Mr. Rowley of the Rueful Countenance, and found him less yellow, but still contrite, and listening to Mrs. McRankine, who sat with open book by his bedside, and plied him with pertinent dehortations from the Book of Proverbs.

He brightened.

"My heye, Mr. Hann, if that ain't up to the knocker!"

Mrs. McRankine closed the book, and conned me with austerer approval.

"Ye carry it well, I will say."

"It fits, I think."

I turned myself complacently about.

"The drink, I'm meaning. I kenned McRankine."

"Shall we talk of business, madam? In the first place, the quittance for our board and lodging."

"I mak' it out on Saturdays."

"Do so; and deduct it out of this." I handed twenty-five of my guineas into her keeping: this left me with five and a crown-piece in my pocket. "The balance, while it lasts, will serve for Rowley's keep and current expenses. Before long I hope he may lift the money which lies in the bank at his service, as he knows."

"But you'll come back, Mr. Anne?" cried the lad.

"I'm afraid it's a toss-up, my boy. Discipline, remember!"—for he was preparing to leap out of bed there and then—"You can serve me better in Edinburgh. All you have to do is to wait for a clear coast, and seek and present yourself in private before Mr. T. Robbie of Castle Street, or Miss Flora Gilchrist of Swanston Cottage. From either or both of these you will take your instructions. Here are the addresses."

"'Miss Floorer?'—and you called Anne, sir! Beggin' your pardon, but it do seem as it ought to have been t'other way round."

"If that's a' your need for the lad," said Mrs. McRankine, "he'll be eating his head off; no to say drinking." Rowley winced. "I'll tak' him on mysel'."

"My dear woman——"

"He'll be a brand frae the burnin': and he'll do to clean the knives."

She would hear no denial. I committed the lad to her in this double capacity; and, equipped with a pair of goloshes from the wardrobe of the late McRankine, sallied forth upon the rain-swept street.

The card of admission directed me to Buccleuch Place, a little off George Square; and here I found a wet rag of a crowd gathered about a couple of lanterns and a striped awning. Beneath the awning a panel of light fell on the plashy pavement. Already the guests were arriving. I whipped in briskly, presented my card, and passed up a staircase decorated with flags, evergreens, and national emblems. A venerable flunkey waited for me at the summit. "Cloak lobby to the left, sir." I obeyed, and exchanged my overcoat and goloshes for a circular metal ticket. "What name, sir?" he purred over my card, as I lingered in the vestibule for a moment to scan the ball-room and my field of action: then, having cleared his throat, bawled suddenly, "Mr. Ducie!"

It might have been a stage direction. *'A tucket sounds. Enter the Vicomte, disguised.'* To tell the truth, this entry was a daunting business. A dance had just come to an end; and the musicians in the gallery had fallen to tuning their violins. The chairs arrayed along the walls were thinly occupied, and as yet the social temperature scarce rose to thawing-point. In fact, the second-rate people had arrived, and from the far end of the room were nervously watching the door for notables. Consequently my entrance drew a disquieting fire of observation. The mirrors, reflectors, and girandoles had eyes for me; and as I advanced up the perspective of waxed floor, the very boards winked detection. A little Master of Ceremonies, as round as the rosette on his lapel, detached himself from the nearest group, and approached with something of a skater's motion and an insinuating smile.

"Mr.—a—Ducie, if I heard aright? A stranger, I believe, to our northern capital, and I hope a dancer?" I bowed. "Grant me the pleasure, Mr. Ducie, of finding you a partner."

"If," said I, "you would present me to the young lady yonder, beneath the musicians' gallery——" For I recognised Master Ronald's flame, the girl in pink of Mr. Robbie's party, to-night gowned in apple-green.

"Miss McBean—Miss Camilla McBean? With pleasure. Great discrimination you show, sir. Be so good as to follow me."

I was led forward and presented. Miss McBean responded to my bow with great play of shoulders; and in turn presented me to her mother, a mustachioed lady in stiff black silk, surmounted with a black cap and coquelicot trimmings.

"Any friend of Mr. Robbie's, I'm sure," murmured Mrs. McBean, affably

inclining. "Look, Camilla dear—Sir William and Lady Frazer—in laylock sarsnet—how well that diamond bandeau becomes her! They are early to-night. As I was saying, Mr.—"

"Ducie."

"To be sure. As I was saying, *any* friend of Mr. Robbie—one of my oldest acquaintance. If you can manage now to break him of his bachelor habits! You are making a long stay in Edinburgh?"

"I fear, madam, that I must leave it to-morrow."

"You have seen all our lions, I suppose? The Castle, now? Ah, the attractions of London!—now don't shake your head, Mr. Ducie. I hope I know a Londoner when I see one. And yet 'twould surprise you how fast we are advancing in Edinburgh. Camilla dear, that Miss Scrymgeour has edged her China crape with the very ribbon trimmings—black satin with pearl edge—we saw in that new shop in Princes Street yesterday: sixpenny width at the bottom, and three-three-farthings round the bodice. Perhaps you can tell me, Mr. Ducie, if it's really true that ribbon trimmings are *the height* in London and Bath this year?"

But the band struck up, and I swept the unresisting Camilla towards the set. After the dance, the ladies (who were kind enough to compliment me on my performance) suffered themselves to be led to the tea-room. By this time the arrivals were following each other thick and fast; and, standing by the tea-table, I heard name after name vociferated at the ball-room door, but never the name my nerves were on the strain to echo. Surely Flora would come: surely none of her guardians, natural or officious, would expect to find me at the ball. But the minutes passed, and I must convey Mrs. and Miss McBean back to their seats beneath the gallery.

"Mrs. Gilchrist—Miss Gilchrist—Mr. Ronald Gilchrist! Mr. Robbie! Major Arthur Chevenix!"

The first name plumped like a shot across my bows, and brought me up standing—for a second only. Before the catalogue was out, I had dropped the McBeans at their moorings and was heading down on my enemies' line of battle. Their faces were a picture. Flora's cheek flushed, and her lips parted in the prettiest cry of wonder. Mr. Robbie took snuff. Ronald went red in the face, and Major Chevenix white. The intrepid Mrs. Gilchrist turned not a hair.

"What will be the meaning of this?" she demanded, drawing to a stand, and surveying me through her gold-rimmed eyeglass.

"Madam," said I, with a glance at Chevenix, "you may call it a cutting-out expedition."

"Mrs. Gilchrist," he began, "you will surely not——"

But I was too quick for him.

"Madam, since when has the gallant Major superseded Mr. Robbie as your family adviser?"

"H'mph!" said Mrs. Gilchrist; which in itself was not reassuring. But she turned to the lawyer.

"My dear lady," he answered her look, "this very imprudent young man seems to have burnt his boats, and no doubt recks very little if, in that heroical conflagration, he burns our fingers. Speaking, however, as your family adviser"—and he laid enough stress on it to convince me that there was no love lost between him and the interloping Chevenix—"I suggest that we gain nothing by protracting this scene in the face of a crowded assembly. Are you for the card-room, Madam?"

She took his proffered arm, and they swept from us, leaving Master Ronald red and glum, and the Major pale but nonplussed.

"Four from six leaves two," said I; and promptly engaged Flora's arm and towed her away from the silenced batteries.

"And now, my dear," I added, as we found two isolated chairs, "you will kindly demean yourself as if we were met for the first or second time in our lives. Open your fan—so. Now listen: my cousin, Alain, is in Edinburgh, at Dumbreck's Hotel. No, don't lower it."

She held up the fan, though her small wrist trembled.

"There is worse to come. He has brought Bow Street with him, and likely enough at this moment the runners are ransacking the city hot-foot for my lodgings."

"And you linger and show yourself here!—here of all places! Oh, it is mad! Anne, why will you be so rash?"

"For the simple reason that I have been a fool, my dear. I banked the balance of my money in George Street, and the bank is watched. I must have money to win my way south. Therefore I must find you and reclaim the notes you were kind enough to keep for me. I go to Swanston and find you under surveillance of Chevenix, supported by an animal called Towzer. I may have killed Towzer, by the way. If so, transported to an equal sky, he may shortly have the faithful Chevenix to bear him company. I grow tired of Chevenix."

But the fan dropped: her arms lay limp in her lap; and she was staring up at me piteously, with a world of self-reproach in her beautiful eyes.

"And I locked up the notes at home to-night—when I dressed for the ball—the first time they have left my heart! Oh, false!—false of trust that I am!"

"Why, dearest, that is not fatal, I hope. You reach home to-night—you slip them into some hiding—say in the corner of the wall below the garden——"

"Stop: let me think." She picked up her fan again, and behind it her eyes darkened while I watched and she considered. "You know the hill we pass before we reach Swanston?—it has no name, I believe, but Ronald and I have called it the Fish-back since we were children: it has a clump of firs above it, like a fin. There is a quarry on the east slope. If you will be there at eight—I can manage it, I think, and bring the money."

"But why should you run the risk?"

"Please, Anne—oh, please let me *do* something! If you knew what it is to sit at home while your—your dearest——"

"THE VISCOUNT OF SAINT-YVES!"

The name, shouted from the doorway, rang down her faltering sentence as with the clash of an alarm bell. I saw Ronald—in talk with Miss McBean but a few yards away—spin round on his heel and turn slowly back on me with a face of sheer bewilderment. There was no time to conceal myself. To reach either the tea-room or the card-room, I must traverse twelve feet of open floor. We sat in clear view of the main entrance; and there already, with eyeglass lifted, raffish, flamboyant, exuding pomades and bad style, stood my detestable cousin. He saw us at once; wheeled right-about-face, and spoke to some one in the vestibule; wheeled round again, and bore straight down, a full swagger varnishing his malign triumph. Flora caught her breath as I stood up to accost him.

"Good evening, my cousin! The newspaper told me you were favouring this city with a stay."

"At Dumbreck's Hotel: where, my dear Anne, you have not yet done me the pleasure to seek me out."

"I gathered," said I, "that you were forestalling the compliment. Our meeting, then, is unexpected?"

"Why, no ; for, to tell you the truth, the secretary of the Ball Committee, this afternoon, allowed me a glance over his list of *invités*. I am apt to be nice about my company, cousin."

Ass that I was ! I had never given this obvious danger so much as a thought.

"I fancy I have seen one of your latest intimates about the street."

He eyed me, and answered, with a bluff laugh, "Ah ! You gave us the very devil of a chase. You appear, my dear Anne, to have a hare's propensity for running in your tracks. And begad, I don't wonder at it !" he wound up, ogling Flora with an insolent stare.

Him one might have hunted by scent alone. He reeked of essences.

"Present me, *mon brave*."

"I'll be shot if I do."

"I believe they reserve that privilege for soldiers," he mused.

"At any rate they don't extend it to——" I pulled up on the word. He had the upper hand, but I could at least play the game out with decency. "Come," said I, "a *contre-dan e* will begin presently. Find yourself a partner, and I promise you shall be our *vis-à-vis*."

"You have blood in you, my cousin."

He bowed, and went in search of the Master of Ceremonies. I gave an arm to Flora. "Well, and how does Alain strike you ?" I asked.

"He is a handsome man," she allowed. "If your uncle had treated him differently, I believe——"

"And I believe that no woman alive can distinguish between a gentleman and a dancing-master ! A posture or two, and you interpret worth. My dear girl—that fellow !"

She was silent. I have since learnt why. It seems, if you please, that the very same remark had been made to her by that idiot Chevenix, upon me !

We were close to the door : we passed it, and I flung a glance into the vestibule. There, sure enough, at the head of the stairs, was posted my friend of the moleskin waistcoat, in talk with a confederate by some shades uglier than himself—a red-headed, loose-legged scoundrel in cinder-grey.

I was fairly in the trap. I turned, and between the moving crowd caught Alain's eye and his evil smile. He had found a partner: no less a personage than Lady Frazer of the lilac sarsnet and diamond bandeau.

For some unaccountable reason, in this infernal *impasse* my spirits began to rise, to soar. I declare it : I led Flora forward to the set with a gaiety which may have been unnatural, but was certainly not factitious. A Scotsman would have called me "fey." As the song goes—and it matters not if I had it then, or read it later in my wife's library—

"Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,
Sae dauntingly gaed he ;
He played a spring and danced it round
Beneath ——"

never mind what. The band played the spring and I danced it round, while my cousin eyed me with extorted approval. The quadrille includes an absurd figure—called, I think, *La Pastourelle*. You take a lady with either hand and jig them to and fro, for all the world like an Englishman of legend parading a couple of wives for sale at Smithfield ; while the other male, like a timid purchaser, backs and advances with his arms dangling.

"I've lived a life of sturt and strife,
I die by treacherie——"

I challenged Alain with an open smile as he backed before us; and no sooner was the dance over, than I saw him desert Lady Frazer on a hurried excuse, and seek the door to satisfy himself that his men were on guard.

I dropped laughing into a chair beside Flora. "Anne," she whispered, "who is on the stairs?"

"Two Bow Street runners."

If you have seen a dove—a dove caught in a gin! "The back stairs!" she urged.

"They will be watched too. But let us make sure." I crossed to the tea-room, and, encountering a waiter, drew him aside. Was there a man watching the back entrance? He could not tell me. For a guinea would he find out? He went, and returned in less than a minute. Yes, there was a constable below. "It's just a young gentleman to be put to the haw for debt," I explained, recalling the barbarous and, to me, still unmeaning phrase. "I'm no speiring," replied the waiter.

I made my way back, and was not a little disgusted to find my chair occupied by the unconscionable Chevenix.

"My dear Miss Flora, you are unwell!" Indeed, she was pale enough, poor child, and trembling. "Major, she will be swooning in another minute. Get her to the tea-room, quick! while I fetch Mrs. Gilchrist. She must be taken home."

"It is nothing," she faltered: "it will pass. Pray do not——" As she glanced up, she caught my meaning. "Yes, yes: I will go home."

She took the Major's arm, while I hurried to the card-room. As luck would have it, the old lady was in the act of rising from the green table, having just cut out from a rubber. Mr. Robbie was her partner; and I saw (and blessed my star for the first time that night) the little heap of silver which told that she had been winning.

"Mrs. Gilchrist," I whispered, "Miss Flora is faint: the heat of the room——"

"I've not observed it. The venteelation is considered pairfect."

"She wishes to be taken home."

With fine composure she counted back her money, piece by piece, into a velvet reticule.

"Twelve and sixpence," she proclaimed. "Ye held good cards, Mr. Robbie. Well, Mosh, the Viscount, we'll go and see about it."

I led her to the tea-room: Mr. Robbie followed. Flora rested on a sofa in a truly dismal state of collapse, while the Major fussed about her with a cup of tea. "I have sent Ronald for the carriage," he announced.

"H'm," said Mrs. Gilchrist, eyeing him oddly, "well, it's your risk. Ye'd best hand me the teacup, and get our shawls from the lobby. You have the tickets. Be ready for us at the top of the stairs."

No sooner was the Major gone than, keeping an eye on her niece, this importunible lady stirred the tea and drank it down herself. As she drained the cup—her back for the moment being turned on Mr. Robbie—I was aware of a facial contortion. Was the tea (as children say) going the wrong way?

No: I believe—aid me Apollo and the Nine! I believe—though I have never dared, and shall never dare to ask—that Mrs. Gilchrist was doing her best to wink!

On the instant entered Master Ronald with word that the carriage was ready. I slipped to the door and reconnoitred. The crowd was thick in the ball-room; a dance in full swing; my cousin gambolling vivaciously, and, for the moment, with his back to us. Flora leaned on Ronald, and, skirting the wall, our party gained the great door and the vestibule, where Chevenix stood with an armful of cloaks.

"You and Ronald can return and enjoy yourselves," said the old lady, "as soon as ye've packed us off. Ye'll find a hackney coach, no doubt, to bring ye home." Her eye rested on the two runners, who were putting their heads together behind the Major. She turned on me with a stiff curtsy. "Good-night, sir, and I am obliged for your services. Or stay—you may see us to the carriage, if ye'll be so kind. Major, hand Mr. What-d'ye-call some of your wraps."

My eyes did not dare to bless her. We moved down the stairs—Mrs. Gilchrist leading, Flora supported by her brother and Mr. Robbie, the Major and I behind. As I descended the first step, the red-headed runner made a move forward. Though my gaze was glued upon the pattern of Mrs. Gilchrist's Paisley shawl, I saw his finger touch my arm. Yes, and I felt it, like a touch of hot iron. The other man—Moleskin—plucked him by the arm: they whispered. They saw me bare-headed, without my overcoat. They argued, no doubt, that I was unaware; was seeing the ladies to their carriage; would of course return. They let me pass.

Once in the boisterous street, I darted round to the dark side of the carriage, Ronald ran forward to the coachman (whom I recognised for the gardener, Robie). "Miss Flora is faint. Home, as fast as you can!" He skipped back under the awning. "A guinea to make it faster!" I called up from the other side of the box-seat; and out of the darkness and rain I held up the coin and pressed it into Robie's damp palm. "What in the name——!" He peered round, but I was back and close against the step. The door was slammed. "Right away!"

It may have been fancy; but with the shout I seemed to hear the voice of Alain lifted in imprecation on the Assembly Room stairs. As Robie touched up the grey, I whipped open the door on my side and tumbled in—upon Mrs. Gilchrist's lap.

Flora choked down a cry. I recovered myself, dropped into a heap of rugs on the seat facing the ladies, and pulled to the door by its strap.

Dead silence from Mrs. Gilchrist!

I had to apologise, of course. The wheels rumbled and jolted over the cobbles of Edinburgh; the windows rattled and shook under the uncertain gusts of the city. When we passed a street lamp it shed no light into the vehicle, but the awful profile of my protectress loomed out for a second against the yellow haze of the pane, and sank back into impenetrable shade.

"Madam, some explanation—enough at least to mitigate your resentment—natural, I allow——" Jolt, jolt! And still a mortuary silence within the coach! It was disconcerting. Robie for a certainty was driving his best, and already we were beyond the last rare outposts of light on the Lothian Road.

"I believe, madam, the inside of five minutes—if you will allow——"

I stretched out a protesting hand. In the darkness it encountered Flora's. Our fingers closed upon the thrill. For five, ten beatific seconds our pulses sang together, "I love you! I love you!" in the stuffy silence.

"Mosha Saint Yvey!" spoke up a deliberate voice (Flora caught her hand away), "as far as I can make head and tail of your business—supposing it to have a modicum of head, which I doubt—it appears to me that I have just done you a service; and that makes twice."

"A service, madam, I shall ever remember."

"I'll chance that, sir; if ye'll kindly not forget *yoursel*!"

In resumed silence we must have travelled a mile and a half, or two miles, when Mrs. Gilchrist let down the sash with a clatter, and thrust her head and mamelone cap forth into the night.

"Robie!"

Robie pulled up.

"The gentleman will alight."

It was only wisdom, for we were nearing Swanston. I rose. "Mrs. Gilchrist, you are a good woman; and I think the cleverest I have met." "Umph!" replied she. In the act of stepping forth I turned for a final handshake with Flora, and my foot caught in something and dragged it out upon the road. I stooped to pick it up, and heard the door bang by my ear.

"Madam—your shawl!"

But the coach lurched forward; the wheels splashed me; and I was left standing, alone on the inclement highway.

While yet I watched the little red eyes of the vehicle, and almost as they vanished, I heard more rumbling of wheels, and descried two pairs of yellow eyes upon the road, towards Edinburgh. There was just time enough to plunge aside, to leap a fence into a rain-soaked pasture; and there I crouched, the water squishing over my dancing-shoes, while with a flare, a slant of rain, and a glimpse of flogging drivers, two hackney carriages pelted by at a gallop.

CHAPTER XXXII.

EVENTS OF FRIDAY MORNING: THE CUTTING OF THE GORDIAN KNOT.

I PULLED out my watch. A fickle ray—the merest filtration of moonlight—glimmered on the dial. Fourteen minutes past one! "Past yin o'clock, and a dark, haary moarnin." I recalled the bull voice of the watchman as he had called it on the night of our escape from the Castle—its very tones: and this echo of memory seemed to strike and reverberate the hour closing a long day of fate. Truly since that night the hands had run full circle, and were back at the old starting-point. I had seen dawn, day: I had basked in the sunshine of men's respect; I was back in the Stygian night—back in the shadow of that infernal Castle—still hunted by the law, with possibly a smaller chance than ever of escape—the cockshy of the elements—with no shelter for my head but a Paisley shawl of violent pattern. It occurred to me that I had travelled much in the interval, and run many risks, to exchange a suit of mustard yellow for a Paisley shawl and a ball dress that matched neither it nor the climate of the Pentlands. The exhilaration of the ball, the fighting spirit, the last communicated thrill of Flora's hand, died out of me. In the thickening envelope of sea fog I felt like a squirrel in a rotatory cage. That was a lugubrious hour.

To speak precisely, those were seven lugubrious hours,—since Flora would not be due before eight o'clock, if, indeed, I might count on her eluding her double cordon of spies. The question was, whither to turn in the meantime? Certainly not back to the town. In the near neighbourhood I knew of no roof but 'The Hunters' Tryst, by Alexander Hendry. Suppose that I found it (and the chances in that fog were perhaps against me), would Alexander Hendry, aroused from his bed, be likely to extend his hospitality to a traveller with no more luggage than a Paisley shawl? He might think I had stolen it. I had borne it down the staircase under the eyes of the runners, and the pattern was bitten upon my brain. It was doubtless unique in the district, and familiar: an oriflamme of battle over the barter of dairy produce and malt liquors. Alexander Hendry *must* recognise it, and with an instinct of antagonism. Patently it formed no part of my proper wardrobe: hardly could it be explained as a *gage d'amour*. Eccentric hunters trysted under Hendry's roof: the Six-Foot Club, for instance. But a hunter in a

frilled shirt and waistcoat sprigged with forget-me-nots ! And the house would be watched, perhaps. Every house around would be watched.

The end was that I wore through the remaining hours of darkness upon the sodden hillside. Superlative Mrs. Gilchrist ! Folded in the mantle of that Spartan dame ; huddled upon a boulder, while the rain descended upon my bare head, and coursed down my nose, and filled my shoes, and insinuated a playful trickle down the ridge of my spine ; I hugged the lacerating fox of self-reproach, and hugged it again, and set my teeth as it bit upon my vitals. Once, indeed, I lifted an accusing arm to heaven. It was as if I had pulled the string of a douche-bath. Heaven flooded the fool with gratuitous tears ; and the fool sat in the puddle of them and knew his folly. But heaven at the same time mercifully veiled that figure of abasement ; and I will lift but a corner of the sheet.

Wind in hidden gullies, and the talk of lapsing waters on the hillside, filled all the spaces of the night. The high road lay at my feet, fifty yards or so below my boulder. Soon after two o'clock (as I made it) lamps appeared in the direction of Swanston, and drew nearer ; and two hackney coaches passed me at a jog-trot, towards the opaline haze into which the fog had subdued the lights of Edinburgh. I heard one of the drivers curse as he went by, and inferred that my open-handed cousin had shirked the weather and gone comfortably from the Assembly Rooms to Dumbreck's Hotel and bed, leaving the chase to his mercenaries.

After this you are to believe that I dozed and woke by snatches. I watched the moon descending in her foggy circle ; but I saw also the mulberry face and minatory forefinger of Mr. Romaine, and caught myself explaining to him and Mr. Robbie that their joint proposal to mortgage my inheritance for a flying broomstick took no account of the working model of the whole Rock and Castle of Edinburgh, which I dragged about by an ankle-chain. Anon I was pelting with Rowley in a claret-coloured chaise through a cloud of robin-redbreasts ; and with that I awoke to the veritable chatter of birds and the white light of dawn upon the hills.

The truth is, I had come very near to the end of my endurance. Cold and rain together, supervening in that hour of the spirit's default, may well have made me light-headed ; nor was it easy to distinguish the tooth of self-reproach from that of genuine hunger. Stiff, qualmish, vacant of body, heart and brain, I left my penitential boulder and crawled down to the road. Glancing along it for sight or warning of the runners, I spied, at two gunshots' distance or less, a milestone with a splash of white upon it—a dragged placard. Abhorrent thought ! Did it announce the price upon the head of Champdivers ? “At least I will see how they describe him”—this I told myself ; but that which tugged at my feet was the baser fascination of fright. I had thought my spine injured by the night's experiences to anything in the way of cold shivers. I discovered my mistake while approaching that scrap of paper.

“AERIAL ASCENSION EXTRAORDINARY !!!

IN

THE MONSTRE BALLOON,

‘LUNARDI.’

PROFESSOR BYFIELD (by diploma), the world-renowned

Exponent of Aerostatics and Aeronautics,

Has the honour to inform the nobility and gentry of Edinburgh and the neighbourhood——”

The shock of it—the sudden descent upon sublimity according to Byfield—took me in the face. I put up my hands. I broke into elfish laughter, and ended

with a sob. Sobs and laughter together shook my fasting body like a leaf; and I zigzagged across the fields, buffeted this side and that by a mirth as uncontrollable as it was idiotic. Once I pulled up in the middle of a spasm to marvel irresponsibly at the sound of my own voice. You may wonder that I had will and wit to be drifted towards Flora's trysting-place. But in truth there was no missing it—the low chine looming through the weather, the line of firs topping it, and, towards the west, diminishing like a fish's dorsal fin. I had conned it often enough from the other side; had looked right across it on the day when she stood beside me on the bastion and pointed out the smoke of Swanston Cottage. Only on this side the fish-tail (so to speak) had a nick in it; and through that nick ran the path to the old quarry.

I reached it a little before eight. The quarry lay to the left of the path, which passed on and out upon the hill's northern slope. Upon that slope there was no need to show myself. I measured out some fifty yards of the path, and paced it to and fro, idly counting my steps; for the chill crept back into my bones if I halted for a minute. Once or twice I turned aside into the quarry, and stood there tracing the veins in the hewn rock; then back to my quarterdeck tramp and the study of my watch. Ten minutes past eight! Fool—to expect her to cheat so many spies! This hunger of mine was becoming serious. . . .

A stone dislodged—a light footfall on the path—and my heart leapt. It was she! She came, and earth flowered again, as beneath the feet of the goddess, her namesake. I declare it for a fact that from the moment of her coming the weather began to mend.

“Flora!”

“My poor Anne!”

“The shawl has been useful,” said I.

“You are starving.”

“That is unpleasantly near the truth.”

“I knew it. See, dear.” A shawl of hoddien grey covered her head and shoulders, and from beneath it she produced a small basket and held it up. “The scones will be hot yet, for they went straight from the hearth into the napkin.”

She led the way to the quarry. I praised her forethought; having in those days still to learn that woman's first instinct, when a man is dear to her and in trouble, is to feed him. We eat to satisfy no very noble appetite; but they incite us to the gross performance on grounds deeper than wit, deep as their helpful helplessness, divine!

We spread the napkin on a big stone of the quarry, and set out the feast: scones, oat-cake, hard-boiled eggs, a bottle of milk, and a small flask of usquebagh. Our hands met as we prepared the table. This was our first housekeeping; the first breakfast of our honeymoon I called it, rallying her. “Starving I may be: but starve I will in sight of food, unless you share it,” and, “It escapes me for the moment, madam, if you take sugar.” We leaned to each other across the rock, and our faces touched. Her cold cheek with the rain upon it, and one small damp curl—for many days I had to feed upon the memory of that kiss, and I feed upon it yet.

“But it beats me how you escaped them,” said I.

She laid down the bannock she had been making pretence to nibble. “Janet,—that is our dairy girl—lent me her frock and shawl: her shoes too. She goes out to the milking at six, and I took her place. The fog helped me. They are hateful.”

“They are, my dear. Chevenix——”

"I mean these clothes. And I am thinking, too, of the poor cows."

"The instinct of animals——" I lifted my glass. "Let us trust it to find means to attract the notice of two paid detectives and two volunteers."

"I had rather count on Aunt," said Flora, with one of her rare and adorable smiles, which fled as it came. "But, Anne, we must not waste time. They are so many against you, and so near. Oh, be serious!"

"Now you are talking like Mr. Romaine."

"For my sake, dear!" She clasped her hands. I took them in mine across the table, and, unclasping them, kissed the palms.

"Sweetheart," I said, "before this weather clears——"

"It is clearing."

"We will give it time. Before this weather clears, I must be across the valley and fetching a circuit for the drovers' road, if you can teach me when to hit it."

She withdrew one of her hands. It went up to the throat of her bodice, and came forth with my packet of notes.

"Good Lord!" said I: "if I hadn't forgotten the money!"

"I think nothing teaches you," sighed she.

She had sewed them in a little bag of yellow oiled silk; and as I held it, warm from her young bosom, and turned it over in my hand, I saw that it was embroidered in scarlet thread with the one word "Anne" beneath the Lion Rampant of Scotland, in imitation of the poor toy I had carved for her—it seemed, so long ago!

"I wear the original," she murmured.

I crushed the parcel into my breast pocket, and, taking both hands again, fell on my knees before her on the stones.

"Flora—my angel! my heart's bride!"

"Hush!" She sprang away. Heavy footsteps were coming up the path. I had just time enough to fling Mrs. Gilchrist's shawl over my head and resume my seat, when a couple of buxom country wives bustled past the mouth of the quarry. They saw us, beyond a doubt: indeed, they stared hard at us, and muttered some comment as they went by and left us gazing at each other.

"They took us for a picnic," I whispered.

"The queer thing," said Flora, "is that they were not surprised. The sight of you——"

"Seen sideways in this shawl, and with my legs hidden by the stone here, I might pass for an elderly female junketer."

"This is scarcely the hour for a picnic," answered my wise girl, "and decidedly not the weather."

The sound of another footstep prevented my reply. This time the wayfarer was an old farmer-looking fellow in a shepherd's plaid and bonnet powdered with mist. He halted before us and nodded, leaning rheumatically on his staff.

"A coarse moarnin'. Ye'll be from Leadburn, I'm thinkin'?"

"Put it at Peebles," said I, making shift to pull the shawl close about my damning finery.

"Peebles!" he said reflectively. "I've ne'er ventured so far as Peebles. I've contemplated it! But I was none sure whether I would like it when I got there. See here: I recommend ye no to be lazin' ower the meat, gin ye'd drap in for the fun. A'm full late, mysel'."

He passed on. What could it mean? We hearkened after his tread. Before it died away, I sprang and caught Flora by the hand.

"Listen! Heavens above us, what is *that*?"

"It sounds to me like Gow's version of *The Caledonian Hunt's Delight*, on a brass band."

Jealous powers! Had Olympus conspired to ridicule our love, that we must exchange our parting vows to the public strains of *The Caledonian Hunt's Delight*, in Gow's version and a semitone flat? For three seconds Flora and I (in the words of a later British bard) looked at each other with a wild surmise, silent. Then she darted to the path, and gazed along it down the hill.

"We must run, Anne. There are more coming!"

We left the scattered relics of breakfast, and, taking hands, scurried along the path northwards. A few yards, and with a sharp turn it led us out of the cutting and upon the open hillside. And here we pulled up together with a gasp.

Right beneath us lay a green meadow, dotted with a crowd of two or three hundred people; and over the nucleus of this gathering, where it condensed into a black swarm, as of bees, there floated, not only the dispiriting music of *The Caledonian Hunt's Delight*, but an object of size and shape suggesting the Genie escaped from the Fisherman's Bottle as described in M. Galland's ingenious *Thousand and One Nights*. It was Byfield's balloon—the monster *Lunardi*—in process of inflation.

"Confound Byfield!" I ejaculated in my haste.

"Who is Byfield?"

"An aeronaut, my dear, of bilious humour; which no doubt accounts for his owning a balloon striped alternately with liver-colour and pale blue, and for his arranging it and a brass band in the very line of my escape. That man dogs me like fate." I broke off sharply. "And after all, why not?" I cried.

The next instant I swung round, as Flora uttered a piteous little cry; and there, behind us, in the outlet of the cutting, stood Major Chevenix and Ronald.

The boy stepped forward, and, ignoring my bow, laid a hand on Flora's arm.

"You will come home at once."

I touched his shoulder. "Surely not," I said, "seeing that the spectacle apparently wants but ten minutes of its climax."

He swung on me in a passion. "For God's sake, St. Yves, don't force a quarrel now, of all moments! Man, haven't you compromised my sister enough?"

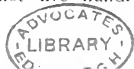
"It seems to me that, having set a watch on your sister at the suggestion and with the help of a casual Major of Foot, you might in decency reserve the word 'compromise' for home consumption; and further, that against adversaries so poorly sensitive to her feelings, your sister may be pardoned for putting her resentment into action."

"Major Chevenix is a friend of the family." But the lad blushed as he said it.

"The family?" I echoed. "So? Pray, did your aunt invite his help? No, no, my dear Ronald; you cannot answer that. And while you play the game of insult to your sister, sir, I will see that you eat the discredit of it."

"Excuse me," interposed the Major, stepping forward. "As Ronald said, this is not the moment for quarrelling; and as you observed, sir, the climax is not so far off. The runner and his men are even now coming round the hill. We saw them mounting the slope, and (I may add) your cousin's carriage drawn up on the road below. The fact is, Miss Gilchrist has been traced to the hill; and as it secretly occurred to us that the quarry might be her objective, we arranged to take the ascent on this side. See there!" he cried, and flung out a hand.

I looked up. Sure enough, at that instant a grey-coated figure appeared on the summit of the hill, not five hundred yards away to the left. He was



followed closely by my friend of the moleskin waistcoat ; and the pair came sidling down the slope towards us.

"Gentlemen," said I, "it appears that I owe you my thanks. Your stratagem in any case was kindly meant."

"There was Miss Gilchrist to consider," said the Major stiffly.

But Ronald cried, "Quick, St. Ives ! Make a dash back by the quarry path. I warrant we don't hinder."

"Thank you, my friend : I have another notion. Flora," I said, and took her hand, "here is our parting. The next five minutes will decide much. Be brave, dearest ; and your thoughts go with me till I come again."

"Wherever you go, I'll think of you. Whatever happens, I'll love you. Go, and God defend you, Anne !" Her breast heaved, as she faced the Major, red and shamefast, indeed, but gloriously defiant.

"Quick !" cried she and her brother together. I kissed her hand and sprang down the hill.

I heard a shout behind me ; and, glancing back, saw my pursuers—three now, with my full-bodied cousin for whipper-in—change their course as I leapt a brook and headed for the crowded inclosure. A somnolent fat man, bulging, like a feather-bed, on a three-legged stool, dozed at the receipt of custom, with a deal table and a bowl of sixpences before him. I dashed on him with a crown-piece.

"No change given," he objected, waking up and fumbling with a bundle of pink tickets.

"None required." I snatched the ticket and ran through the gateway.

I gave myself time for another look before mingling with the crowd. The moleskin waistcoat was leading now, and had reached the brook ; with red-head a yard or two behind, and my cousin a very bad third, panting—it pleased me to imagine how sorely—across the lower slopes to the eastward. The janitor leaned against his toll-bar and still followed me with a stare. Doubtless by my uncovered head and gala dress he judged me an all-night reveller—a strayed Bacchanal fooling in the morrow's eye.

Prompt upon the inference came inspiration. I must win to the centre of the crowd, and a crowd is invariably indulgent to a drunkard. I hung out the glaring signboard of crapulous glee. Lurching, hiccupping, jostling, apologising to all and sundry with spacious incoherence, I plunged my way through the sightseers, and they gave me passage with all the good-humour in life. Nay—and this was better—they closed in behind and followed to see the fun. Before my retinue grew compact, I turned to assure a respectable matron that "we twa had paid't i' the burn from mornin' sun till dine," and caught a glimpse of my pursuers at the gate, where the dispenser of tickets was clearly attempting to hold them by a long-winded description of me.

I believe that I descended upon that crowd as a godsend, a dancing rivulet of laughter. They needed entertainment. A damper, less enthusiastic company never gathered to a public show. Though the rain had ceased, and the sun shone, those who possessed umbrellas were not to be coaxed, but held them aloft with a settled air of gloom which defied the lenitives of nature and the spasmodic cajolery of the worst band in Edinburgh. "It'll be near full, Jock ?" "It wull." "He'll be startin' in a meenit ?" "Aiblins he wull." "Wull this be the sixt time ye've seen him ?" "I shudna wonder." It occurred to me that, had we come to bury Byfield, not to praise him, we might have displayed a blither interest.

Byfield himself, bending from the car beneath his gently swaying canopy of

liver-colour and pale blue, directed the proceedings with a mien of saturnine preoccupation. He may have been calculating the receipts. As I squeezed to the front, his underlings were shifting the pipe which conveyed the hydrogen gas, and the *Luonardi* strained gently at its ropes. Somebody with a playful thrust sent me staggering into the clear space beneath.

And here a voice hailed and fetched me up with a round turn.

"Ducie, by all that's friendly! Playmate of my youth and prop of my declining years, how goes it?"

It was the egregious Dalmahoy. He clung and steadied himself by one of the dozen ropes binding the car to earth; and with an air of doing it all by his unaided cleverness—an air so indescribably, so majestically drunken, that I could have blushed for the poor expedients which had carried me through the throng.

"You'll excuse me if I don't let go. Fact is, we've been keeping it up a bit all night. Byfield leaves us—to expatiate in realms untrodden by the foot of man—

"The feathered tribes on pinions cleave the air;
Not so the mackerel, and, still less, the bear."

But Byfield does it—Byfield in his Monster Foolardi. One stroke of this knife (always supposing I miss my own hand), and the rope is severed: our common friend scales the empyrean. But he'll come back—oh, never doubt he'll come back!—and begin the dam business over again. 'Tha's the law 'gravity' cording to Byfield."

Mr. Dalmahoy concluded inconsequently with a vocal imitation of a post-horn; and, looking up, I saw the head and shoulders of Byfield projected over the rim of the car.

He drew the natural inference from my dress and demeanour, and groaned aloud.

"Oh, go away—get out of it, Ducie! Isn't one natural born ass enough for me to deal with? You fellows are guying the whole show!"

"Byfield!" I called up eagerly, "I'm not drunk. Reach me down a ladder, quick! A hundred guineas if you'll take me with you!" I saw over the crowd, not ten deep behind me, the red head of the man in grey.

"That proves it," said Byfield. "Go away; or at least keep quiet. I'm going to make a speech." He cleared his throat. "Ladies and gentlemen——"

I held up my packet of notes. "Here's the money,—for pity's sake, man! There are bailiffs after me, in the crowd!"

"——the spectacle which you have honoured with your enlightened patronage—I tell you I can't." He cast a glance behind him into the car—"with your enlightened patronage, needs but few words of introduction or commendation."

"Hear, hear!" from Dalmahoy.

"Your attendance proves the sincerity of your interest——"

I spread out the notes under his eyes. He blinked, but resolutely lifted his voice.

"The spectacle of a solitary voyager——"

"Two hundred!" I called up.

"The spectacle of two hundred solitary voyagers—cradled in the brain of a Montgolfier and a Charles—— Oh, stop it! I'm no public speaker! How the deuce——?"

There was a lurch and a heave in the crowd. "Pitch oot the drunken loon!" cried a voice. On top of it I heard my cousin bawling for a clear passage. With the tail of my eye I caught a glimpse of his plethoric perspiring face as he came

charging past the barrels of the hydrogen-apparatus; and, with that, Byfield had shaken down a rope-ladder and fixed it, and I was scrambling up like a cat.

"Cut the ropes!"

"Stop him!" my cousin bawled. "Stop the balloon! It's Champdivers, the murderer!"

"Cut the ropes!" vociferated Byfield; and to my infinite relief I saw that Dalmahoy was doing his best. A hand clutched at my heel. I let out viciously, amid a roar of the crowd; felt the kick reach and rattle home on somebody's teeth; and, as the crowd made a rush and the balloon swayed and shot upwards, heaved myself over the rim into the car.

Recovering myself on the instant, I bent over. I had on my tongue a neat farewell for Alain, but the sight of a hundred upturned and contorted faces silenced me as a blow might. There had lain my real peril, in the sudden wild-beast rage now suddenly baffled. I read it, as clear as print, and sickened. Nor was Alain in a posture to listen. My kick had sent Moleskin flying on top of him; and borne to earth, prone beneath the superincumbent bulk of his retainer, he lay with hands outspread like a swimmer's and nose buried in the plashy soil.

A few hours before, my cousin had likened me to a hare. Beyond doubt, to a bird's-eye view, just now he rather resembled a tortoise.

Written by

A. T. QUILLER COUCH,

after Robert Louis Stevenson's notes.





THE ADVENTURES OF A FRENCH PRISONER IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE INCOMPLETE AÉRONAUTS.

ALL this I took in at a glance: I dare say in three seconds or less. The hubbub beneath us dropped to a low, rumbling bass. Suddenly a woman's scream divided it—one high-pitched, penetrating scream, followed by silence. And then, as a pack of hounds will start into cry, voice after voice caught up the scream and reduplicated it, until the whole enclosure rang with alarm.

"Hullo!" Byfield called to me, "what the deuce is happening now?" and ran to his side of the car. "Good Lord, it's Dalmahoy!"

It was. Beneath us, at the tail of a depending rope, that unhappy lunatic dangled between earth and sky. He had been the first to cut the tether; and, having severed it below his grasp, had held on while the others cut loose, taking even the asinine precaution to loop the end twice round his wrist. Of course the upward surge of the balloon had heaved him off his feet, and his muddled instinct did the rest. Clutching now with both hands, he was borne aloft like a lamb from the flock.

So we reasoned afterwards. "The grapnel!" gasped Byfield: for Dalmahoy's rope was fastened beneath the floor of the car, and not to be reached by us. We fumbled to cast the grapnel loose, and shouted down together,—

"For God's sake hold on! Catch the anchor when it comes! You'll break your neck if you drop!"

He swung into sight again beyond the edge of the floor, and uplifted a strained, white face. We cast loose the grapnel, lowered it and jerked it towards him. He swung past it like a pendulum, caught at it with one hand, and missed: came flying back on the receding curve, and missed again. At the third attempt he blundered right against it, and flung an arm over one of the flukes, next a leg, and in a trice we were hauling up, hand over hand.

We dragged him inboard. He was pale, but undefeatedly voluble.

"Must apologise to you fellows, really. Dam silly, clumsy kind of thing to do: might have been awkward too. Thank you, Byfield my boy, I will: two fingers only—a harmless steadier."

He took the flask and was lifting it. But his jaw dropped and his hand hung arrested.

"He's going to faint," I cried. "The strain——"

"Strain on your grandmother, Ducie! What's *that*?"

He was staring past my shoulder, and on the instant I was aware of a voice—not the aéronaut's—speaking behind me and, as it were, out of the clouds,—

"I tak' ye to witness, Mister Byfield——"

Consider, if you please. For six days I had been oscillating within a pretty complete circumference of alarms. It is small blame to me, I hope, that, with my nerve on so nice a pivot, I quivered and swung to this new apprehension like a needle in a compass-box.

On the floor of the car, at my feet, lay a heap of plaid rugs and overcoats, from which, successively and painfully disinvolved, there emerged first a hand clutching a rusty beaver hat, next a mildly indignant face in spectacles, and finally the rearward of a very small man in a seedy suit of black. He rose on his knees, his finger-tips resting on the floor, and contemplated the aéronaut over his glasses with a world of reproach.

"I tak' ye to witness, Mr. Byfield!"

Byfield mopped a perspiring brow.

"My dear sir," he stammered, "all a mistake—no fault of mine—explain presently"; then, as one catching at an inspiration, "Allow me to introduce you. Mr. Dalmahoy, Mr.——"

"My name is Sheepshanks," said the little man stiffly. "But you'll excuse me——"

Mr. Dalmahoy interrupted with a playful cat-call.

"Hear, hear! *Silence!* 'His name is Sheepshanks. On the Grampian Hills His father kept his flocks—a thousand sheep,' and, I make no doubt, shanks in proportion. Excuse you, Sheepshanks? My *dear* sir! At this altitude one shank was more than we had a right to expect: the plural multiplies the obligation." Keeping a tight hold on his hysteria, Dalmahoy steadied himself by a rope and bowed.

"And I, sir"—as Mr. Sheepshanks' thoroughly bewildered gaze travelled around and met mine—"I, sir, am the Vicomte Anne de Kéroual de St. Yves, at your service. I haven't a notion how or why you come to be here: but you seem likely to be an acquisition. On my part," I continued, as there leapt into my mind the stanza I had vainly tried to recover in Mrs. McRankine's sitting-room, "I have the honour to refer you to the inimitable Roman, Flaccus—

'Virtus, recludens immeritis mori
Coelum, negata temptat iter via,
Coetusque vulgaris et udam
Spernit humum fugiente penna.'

—you have the Latin, sir?"

"Not a word." He subsided upon the pile of rugs and spread out his hands in protest. "I tak' ye to witness, Mr. Byfield!"

"Then in a minute or so I will do myself the pleasure of construing," said I, and turned to scan the earth we were leaving—I had not guessed how rapidly.

We contemplated it from the height of six hundred feet—or so Byfield asserted after consulting his barometer. He added that this was a mere nothing: the wonder was the balloon had risen at all, with one-half of the total folly of Edinburgh clinging to the ear. I passed the possible inaccuracy and certain ill-temper of this calculation. He had (he explained) made jettison of at least a hundredweight of sand ballast. I could only hope it had fallen on my cousin. To me, six hundred feet appeared a very respectable eminence. And the view was ravishing.

The *Lunardi*, mounting through a stagnant calm in a line almost vertical, had pierced the morning mists, and now swam emancipated in a heaven of exquisite blue. Below us, by some trick of eyesight, the country had grown concave, its horizons curving up like the rim of a shallow bowl—a bowl heaped, in point of fact, with sea-fog, but to our eyes with a froth delicate and dazzling as a whipped syllabub of snow. Upon it the travelling shadow of the balloon became no shadow, but a stain: an amethyst (you might call it) purged of all grosser properties than colour and lucency. At times, thrilled by no perceptible wind, rather by the pulse of the sun's rays, the froth shook and parted; and then behold, deep in the *crevasses*, vignettied and shining, an acre or two of the earth of man's business and fret—tilled slopes of the Lothians, ships dotted on the Forth, the capital like a hive that some child had smoked—the ear of fancy could almost hear it buzzing.

I snatched the glass from Byfield, and brought it to focus upon one of these peepshow rifts: and lo! at the foot of the shaft, imaged, as it were, far down in a luminous well, a green hillside and three figures standing. A white speck fluttered; and fluttered until the rift closed again. Flora's handkerchief! Blessings on the brave hand that waved it!—at a moment when (as I have since heard, and knew without need of hearing) her heart was down in her shoes, or, to speak accurately, in the milkmaid Janet's. Singular in many things, she was at one with the rest of her sex in its native and incurable distrust of man's inventions.

I am bound to say that my own faith in ærostatics was a plant—a sensitive plant—of extremely tender growth. Either I failed, a while back, in painting the emotions of my descent of the *Devil's Elbow*, or the reader knows that I am a chicken-hearted fellow about a height. I make him a present of the admission. Set me on a plane superficies, and I will jog with all the *insouciance* of a rolling stone: toss me in air, and, with the stone in the child's adage, I am in the hands of the devil. Even to the qualified instability of a sea-going ship I have ever committed myself with resignation rather than confidence.

But to my unspeakable relief the *Lunardi* floated upwards, and continued to float, almost without a tremor. Only by reading the barometer, or by casting scraps of paper overboard, could we tell that the machine moved at all. Now and again we revolved slowly: so Byfield's compass informed us, but for ourselves we had never guessed it. Of dizziness I felt no longer a symptom, for the sufficient reason that the provocatives were nowhere at hand. We were the only point in space, without possibility of comparison with another. -We were made one with the clean silences receiving us; and, speaking only for the Vicomte Anne de St. Yves, I dare assert that for five minutes a newly bathed infant had not been less conscious of original sin.

"But look here, you know"—it was Byfield at my elbow—"I'm a public character, by George; and this puts me in a devilish awkward position."

"So it does," I agreed. "You proclaimed yourself a solitary voyager; and here, to the naked eye, are four of us."

"And pray how can I help that? If, at the last moment, a couple of lunatics come rushing in——"

"They still leave Sheepshanks to be accounted for." Byfield began to irritate me. I turned to the stowaway. "Perhaps," said I, "Mr. Sheepshanks will explain?"

"I paid in advance," Mr. Sheepshanks began, eager to seize the opening presented. "The fact is, I'm a married man."

"Already at two points you have the advantage of us. Proceed, sir."

"You were good enough, just now, to give me your name, Mr.——"

"The Vicomte Anne de Kérroual de St. Yves."

"It is a somewhat difficult name to remember."

"If that be all, sir, within two minutes you shall have a *memoria technica* prepared for use during the voyage."

Mr. Sheepshanks harked back. "I am a married man, and—d'ye see?—Mrs. Sheepshanks, as you might say, has no sympathy with ballooning. She was a Guthrie, of Dumfries."

"Which accounts for it, to be sure," said I.

"To me, sir, on the contrary, *aërostatics* have long been an alluring study. I might even, Mr.——, I might even, I say, term it the passion of my life.' His mild eyes shone behind their glasses. "I remember Vincent Lunardi, sir. I was present in Heriot's Gardens when he made an ascension there in October '85. He came down at Cupar. The Society of Gentlemen Golfers at Cupar presented him with an address; and at Edinburgh he was admitted Knight Companion of the Beggar's Benison, a social company, or (as I may say) crew, since defunct. A thin-faced man, sir. He wore a peculiar bonnet, if I may use the expression, very much cocked up behind. The shape became fashionable. He once pawned his watch with me, sir; that being my profession. I regret to say he redeemed it subsequently: otherwise I might have the pleasure of showing it to you. Oh yes, the theory of ballooning has long been a passion with me. But in deference to Mrs. Sheepshanks I have abstained from the actual practice—until to-day. To tell you the truth, my wife believes me to be brushing off the cobwebs in the Kyles of Bute."

"*Are there any cobwebs in the Kyles of Bute?*" asked Dalmahoy, in a tone unnaturally calm.

"A figure of speech, sir—as one might say, holiday-keeping there. I paid Mr. Byfield five pounds in advance. I have his receipt. And the stipulation was that I should be concealed in the car and make the ascension with him alone."

"Are we then to take it, sir, that our company offends you?" I demanded.

He made haste to disclaim. "Not at all: decidedly not in the least. But the chances were for less agreeable associates." I nodded. "And a bargain's a bargain," he wound up.

"So it is," said I. "Byfield, hand Mr. Sheepshanks back his five pounds."

"Oh, come now!" the *aëronaut* objected. "And who may you be, to be ordering a man about?"

"I believe I have already answered that question twice in your hearing."

"Mosha the Viscount Thingamy de Something-or-other? I dare say!"

"Have you any objection?"

"Not the smallest. For all I care, you are Robert Burns, or Napoleon Bonaparte, or anything, from the Mother of the Gracchi to Balaam's Ass. But I

knew you first as Mr. Ducie ; and you may take it that I'm Mr. Don't see." He reached up a hand towards the valve-string.

"What are you proposing to do?"

"To descend."

"What?—back to the enclosure?"

"Scarcely that, seeing that we have struck a northerly current, and are travelling at the rate of thirty miles an hour, perhaps. That's Broad Law to the south of us, as I make it out."

"But why descend at all?"

"Because it sticks in my head that some one in the crowd called you by a name that wasn't Ducie ; and by a title, for that matter, which didn't sound like 'Viscount.' I took it at the time for a constable's trick ; but I begin to have my strong doubts."

The fellow was dangerous. I stooped nonchalantly, on pretence of picking up a plaid ; for the air had turned bitterly cold, of a sudden.

"Mr. Byfield, a word in your private ear, if you will."

"As you please," said he, dropping the valve-string.

We leaned together over the breastwork of the car. "If I mistake not," I said, speaking low, "the name was Champdivers."

He nodded.

"The gentleman who raised that foolish but infernally risky cry was my own cousin, the Viscount de St. Yves. I give you my word of honour to that." Observing that this staggered him, I added, mighty slyly, "I suppose it doesn't occur to you now that the whole affair was a game, for a friendly wager?"

"No," he answered brutally, "it doesn't. And what's more, it won't go down."

"In that respect," said I, with a sudden change of key, "it resembles your balloon. But I admire the obstinacy of your suspicions ; since, as a matter of fact, I am Champdivers."

"The mur——"

"Certainly not. I killed the man in fair duel."

"Ha!" he eyed me with sour distrust. "That is what you have to prove."

"Man alive, you don't expect me to demonstrate it up here, by the simple apparatus of ballooning!"

"There is no talk of 'up here,'" said he, and reached for the valve string.

"Say 'down there,' then. Down there it is no business of the accused to prove his innocence. By what I have heard of the law, English or Scotch, the boot is on the other leg. But I'll tell you what I *can* prove. I can prove, sir, that I have been a deal in your company of late ; that I supped with you and Mr. Dalmahoy no longer ago than Wednesday. You may put it that we three are here together again by accident ; that you never suspected me ; that my invasion of your machine was a complete surprise to you, and, so far as you were concerned, wholly fortuitous. But ask yourself what any intelligent jury is likely to make of that cock-and-bull story." Mr. Byfield was visibly shaken. "Add to this," I proceeded, "that you have to explain Sheepshanks ; to confess that you gulled the public by advertising a lonely ascension, and haranguing a befooled multitude to the same intent, when, all the time, you had a companion concealed in the car. 'A public character' you call yourself! My word, sir! there'll be no mistake about it, this time."

I paused, took breath, and shook a finger at him:—

“Now just you listen to me, Mr. Byfield. Pull that string, and a sadly discredited aeronaut descends upon the least charitable of worlds. Why, sir, in any case your game in Edinburgh is up. The public is dog-tired of you and your ascensions, as any observant child in to-day’s crowd could have told you. The truth was there staring you in the face; and next time even your purblind vanity must recognise it. Consider; I offered you two hundred guineas for the convenience of your balloon. I now double that offer on condition that I become its owner during this trip, and that you manipulate it as I wish. Here are the notes; and out of the total you will refund five pounds to Mr. Sheepshanks.”

Byfield’s complexion had grown streaky as his balloon, and with colours not so very dissimilar. I had stabbed upon his vital self-conceit, and the man was really hurt.

“You must give me time,” he stammered.

“By all means.” I knew he was beaten. But only the poorness of my case excused me, and I had no affection for the weapons used. I turned with relief to the others. Dalmahoy was seated on the floor of the car, and helping Mr. Sheepshanks to unpack a carpet bag.

“This will be whisky,” the little pawnbroker announced: “three bottles. My wife said, ‘Surely, Elshander, ye’ll find whisky where ye’re gaun.’ ‘No doubt I will,’ said I, ‘but I’m not very confident of its quality; and it’s a far step.’ My itinerary, Mr. Dalmahoy, was planned from Greenock to the Kyles of Bute and back, and thence coastwise to Saltcoats and the land of Burns. I told her, if she had anything to communicate, to address her letter to the care of the postmaster, Ayr,—ha, ha!” He broke off and gazed reproachfully into Dalmahoy’s impassive face. “Ayr—air,” he explained: “a little play upon words.”

“Skye would have been better,” suggested Dalmahoy, without moving an eyelid.

“Skye? Dear me—capital, capital! Only you see,” he urged, “she wouldn’t expect me to be in Skye.”

A minute later he drew me aside. “Excellent company your friend is, sir: most gentlemanly manners; but at times, if I may so say, not very gleg.”

My hands by this time were numb with cold. We had been ascending steadily, and Byfield’s English thermometer stood at 13 degrees. I borrowed from the heap a thicker overcoat, in the pocket of which I was lucky enough to find a pair of furred gloves; and leaned over for another look below, still with a corner of my eye for the aeronaut, who stood biting his nails, as far from me as the car allowed.

The sea-fog had vanished, and the south of Scotland lay spread beneath us from sea to sea, like a map in monotint. Nay, yonder was England, with the Solway cleaving the coast—a broad, bright spearhead, slightly bent at the tip—and the fells of Cumberland beyond, mere hummocks on the horizon; all else flat as a board or as the bottom of a saucer. White threads of high road connected town to town: the intervening hills had fallen down, and the towns, as if in fright, had shrunk into themselves, contracting their suburbs as a snail his horns. The old poet was right who said that the Olympians had a delicate view. The lace-makers of Valenciennes might have had the tracing of those towns and high roads; those knots of *guipure* and ligatures of finest *résau*-work. And when I considered that what I looked down on—this, with its arteries and nodules of public traffic—was a nation; that each silent nodule held some thousands of men, each man moderately ready to die in defence of his

shopboard and hen-roost; it came into my mind that my Emperor's emblem was the bee, and this Britain the spider's web, sure enough.

Byfield came across and stood at my elbow.

"Mr. Ducie, I have considered your offer, and accept it. It's a curst position——"

"For a public character," I put in affably.

"Don't, sir! I beg that you don't. Your words just now made me suffer a good deal: the more, that I perceive a part of them to be true. An *aéronaut*, sir, has ambition—how can he help it? The public, the newspapers, feed it for a while; they *fête*, and flatter, and applaud him. But in its heart the public ranks him with the mountebank, and reserves the right to drop him when tired of his tricks. Is it wonderful that he forgets this sometimes? For in his own thoughts he is not a mountebank—no, by God he is not!"

The man spoke with genuine passion. I held out my hand.

"Mr. Byfield, my words were brutal. I beg you will allow me to take them back."

He shook his head. "They were true, sir; partly true, that is."

"I am not so sure. A balloon, as you hint and I begin to discover, may alter the perspective of man's ambitions. Here are the notes; and on the top of them I give you my word that you are not abetting a criminal. How long should the *Lunardi* be able to maintain itself in air?"

"I have never tried it; but I calculate on twenty hours—say twenty-four at a pinch."

"We will test it. The current, I see, is still north-east, or from that to north-by-east. And our height?"

He consulted the barometer. "Something under three miles."

Dalmahoy heard, and whooped. "Hi! you fellows, come to lunch! Sandwiches, shortbread, and cleanest Glenlivet—Elshander's Feast:—"

‘Let old Timotheus yield the prize,
Or both divide the crown;
He raised a mortal to the skies——’

Sheepshanks provided the whisky. Rise, Elshander: observe that you have no worlds left to conquer, and having shed the perfunctory tear, pass the corkscrew. Come along, Ducie: come, my Dædalian boy; if you are not hungry, I am, and so is—Sheepshanks—what the dickens do you mean by consorting with a singular verb? *Verbum cum nominativo*—I should say, so *are* sheepshanks."

Byfield produced from one of the lockers a pork pie and a bottle of sherry (the *viaticum* in choice and assortment almost explained the man), and we sat down to the repast. Dalmahoy's tongue ran like a brook. He addressed Mr. Sheepshanks with light-hearted impartiality as Philip's royal son, as the Man of Ross, as the divine Clarinda. He elected him Professor of Marital Diplomacy to the University of Cramond. He passed the bottle and called on him for a toast, a song,—“Oblige me, Sheepshanks, by making the welkin ring.” Mr. Sheepshanks beamed, and gave us a sentiment instead. The little man was enjoying himself amazingly. “Fund of spirits your friend has, to be sure, sir—quite a fund!”

Either my own spirits were running low or the bitter cold had congealed them. I was conscious of my thin ball-suit, and moreover of a masterful desire of sleep. I felt no inclination for food, but drained half a tumblerful of the Sheepshanks whisky, and crawled beneath the pile of plaids. Byfield considerably helped to

arrange them. He may or may not have caught some accent of uncertainty in my thanks: at any rate he thought fit to add the assurance, "You may trust me, Mr. Ducie." I saw that I could, and began almost to like the fellow.

In this posture I dozed through the afternoon. In dreams I heard Dalmahoy and Sheepshanks lifting their voices in amebcean song, and became languidly aware that they were growing uproarious. I heard Byfield expostulating, apparently in vain: for I awoke next to find that Sheepshanks had stumbled over me while illustrating, with an empty bottle, the motions of tossing the caber. "Old Hieland sports," explained Dalmahoy, wiping tears of vain laughter: "his mother's uncle was out in the Forty-five. Sorry to wake you, Ducie: balow, my babe!" It did not occur to me to smoke danger in this tomfoolery. I turned over and dozed again.

It seemed but a minute later that a buzzing in my ears awoke me; with a stab of pain as though my temples were being split with a wedge. On the instant I heard my name cried aloud, and sat up; to find myself blinking in a broad flood of moonlight over against the agitated face of Dalmahoy.

"Byfield——" I began.

Dalmahoy pointed. The *aëronaut* lay at my feet, collapsed like some monstrous marionette, with legs and arms a-splay. Across his legs, with head propped against a locker, declined Sheepshanks, and gazed upwards with an approving smile. "Awkward business," explained Dalmahoy, between gasps. "Sheepshanks 'nmanageable; can't carry his liquor like a gentleman: thought it funny 'both of us pitch out ballast. Byfield lost his temper: worst thing in the world. One thing I pride myself: 'menable to reason. No holding Sheepshanks. Byfield got him down: too late: faint. Sheepshanks wants ring for 'shistance: pulls string: breaks. When the string breaks *Lunardi* won't fall—tha's the devil of it."

"*With* my tol-de-rol," Mr. Sheepshanks murmured. "Pretty—very pretty."

I cast a look aloft. The *Lunardi* was transformed: every inch of it frosted as with silver. All the ropes and cords ran with silver too, or liquid mercury. And in the midst of this sparkling cage, a little below the hoop, and five feet at least above reach, dangled the broken valve-string.

"Well," I said, "you have made a handsome mess of it. Pass me the broken end, and be good enough not to lose your head."

"I wish I could," he groaned, pressing it between his palms. "My dear sir, I'm not frightened, if that is your meaning."

I was, and horribly. But the thing had to be done. The reader will perhaps forgive me for touching shyly on the next two or three minutes, which still recur on the smallest provocation and play bogey with my dreams. To balance on the edge of night, quaking, gripping a frozen rope; to climb and feel the pit of one's stomach slipping like a bucket in a fathomless well—I suppose the intolerable pains in my head spurred me to the attempt—these and the urgent shortness of my breathing—much as toothache will drive a man up to the dentist's chair. I knotted the broken ends of the valve-string and slid back into the car: then tugged the valve open, while with my disengaged arm I wiped the sweat from my forehead. It froze upon the coat-cuff.

In a minute or so the drumming in my ears grew less violent. Dalmahoy bent over the *aëronaut*, who was bleeding at the nose, and now began to breathe stertorously. Sheepshanks had fallen into placid slumber. I kept the valve open until we descended into a stratum of fog—from which, no doubt, the *Lunardi* had lately risen: the moisture collected here would account for its congelated coat of silver. By-and-by, still without rising, we were quit of the fog, and the moon

swept the hollow beneath us, rescuing solitary scraps and sheets of water and letting them slip again like impenetrable ghosts. Small fiery eyes opened and shut on us; cressets of flame on factory chimneys, more and more frequent. I studied the compass. Our course lay south by west. But our whereabouts? Dalmahoy, being appealed to, suggested Glasgow; and thenceforward I let him alone. Byfield snored on.

I pulled out my watch, which I had forgotten to wind; and found it run down. The hands stood at twenty minutes past four. Daylight, then, could not be far off. Eighteen hours—say twenty: and Byfield had guessed our rate at one time to be thirty miles an hour. Five hundred miles——

A line of silver ahead: a ribbon drawn taut across the night, clean-edged, broadening—the sea! In a minute or two I caught the murmur of the coast. “Five hundred miles,” I began to reckon again, and a holy calm dawned on me as the *Lunardi* swept high over the fringing surf, and its voice faded back with the glimmer of a whitewashed fishing-haven.

I roused Dalmahoy and pointed. “The sea!”

“Looks like it. Which, I wonder?”

“The English Channel, man.”

“I say—are you sure?”

“Eh?” exclaimed Byfield, waking up and coming forward with a stagger.

“The English Channel.”

“The French fiddlestick,” said he with equal promptness.

“Oh, have it as you please!” I retorted. It was not worth arguing with the man.

“What is the hour?”

I told him that my watch had run down. His had done the same. Dalmahoy did not carry one. We searched the still prostrate Sheepshanks: his had stopped at ten minutes to four. Byfield replaced it and underlined his disgust with a kick.

“A nice lot!” he ejaculated. “I owe you my thanks, Mr. Ducie, all the same. It was touch and go with us, and my head’s none the better for it.”

“But I say,” expostulated Dalmahoy. “France! This is getting past a joke.”

“So you are really beginning to discover that, are you?”

Byfield stood, holding by a rope, and studied the darkness ahead. Beside him I hugged my conviction—hour after hour, it seemed: and still the dawn did not come.

He turned at length.

“I see a coast line to the south of us. This will be the Bristol Channel, and the balloon is sinking. Pitch out some ballast if these idiots have left any.”

I found a couple of sand bags and emptied them overboard. The coast, as a matter of fact, was close at hand. But the *Lunardi* rose in time to clear the cliff barrier by some hundreds of feet. A wild sea ran on it: of its surf, as of a grey and agonising face, we caught one glimpse as we hurled high and clear over the roar: and, a minute later, to our infinite dismay, were actually skimming the surface of a black hillside. “Hold on!” screamed Byfield, and I had barely time to tighten my grip when crash! the car struck the turf and pitched us together in a heap on the floor. Bump! the next blow shook us like peas in a bladder. I drew my legs up and waited for the third.

None came. The car gyrated madly and swung slowly back to equilibrium. We picked ourselves up, tossed rugs, coats, instruments, promiscuously overboard, and mounted again. The chine of the tall hill, our stumbling-block, fell back and was lost, and we swept forward into formless shadow.

"Confound it!" said Byfield, "the land can't be uninhabited!"

It was, for aught we could see. Not a light showed anywhere; and to make things worse the moon had abandoned us. For one good hour we swept through chaos to the tuneless lamentations of Sheepshanks, who declared that his collar-bone was broken.

Then Dalmahoy flung a hand upwards. Night lay like a sack around and below us; but right aloft, at the zenith, day was trembling. Slowly established, it spread and descended upon us until it touched a distant verge of hills, and these, cut by the rim of the rising sun, flowed suddenly with streams of crimson.

"Over with the grapnel!" Byfield sprang to the valve-string and pulled; and the featureless earth rushed up towards us.

The sunlight through which we were falling had not touched it yet. It leaped on us, drenched in shadow, like some incalculable beast from its covert: a land shaggy with woods and coppices. Between the woods a desolate river glimmered. A colony of herons rose from the tree-tops beneath us and flew squawking for the farther shore.

"This won't do," said Byfield, and shut the escape. "We must win clear of these woods. Hullo!" Ahead of us the river widened abruptly into a shining estuary, populous with anchored shipping. Tall hills flanked it, and in the curve of the westernmost hill a grey town rose from the waterside: its terraces climbing, tier upon tier, like seats in an amphitheatre; its chimneys lifting their smoke over against the dawn. The tiers curved away southward to a round castle and a spit of rock, off which a brig under white canvas stood out for the line of the open sea.

We swept across the roadstead towards the town, trailing our grapnel as it were a hooked fish, a bare hundred feet above the water. Faces stared up at us from the ships' decks. The crew of one lowered a boat to pursue; we were half a mile away before it touched the water. Should we clear the town? At Byfield's orders we stripped off our overcoats and stood ready to lighten ship: but seeing that the deflected wind in the estuary was carrying us towards the suburbs and the harbour's mouth, he changed his mind.

"It is devil or deep sea," he announced. "We will try the grapnel. Look to it, Ducie, while I take the valve!" He pressed a clasp-knife into my hand. "Cut, if I give the word."

We descended a few feet. We were skimming the ridge. The grapnel touched, and in the time it takes you to wink, had ploughed through a kitchen garden, uprooting a regiment of currant bushes; had leaped clear, and was caught in the eaves of a wooden outhouse, fetching us up with a dislocating shock. I heard a rending noise, and picked myself up in time to see the building collapse like a house of cards, and a pair of demented pigs emerge from the ruins and plunge across the garden-beds. And with that I was pitched off my feet again as the hook caught in an iron *chevaux-de-frise*, and held fast.

"Hold tight!" shouted Byfield, as the car lurched and struggled, careering desperately. "Don't cut, man! What the devil!"

Our rope had tautened over the coping of a high stone wall; and the straining *Lunardi*—a very large and handsome blossom, bending on a very thin stalk—overhung the gravelled yard; and lo! from the centre of it stared up at us, rigid with amazement, the faces of a squad of British red-coats!

I believe that the first glimpse of that abhorred uniform brought my knife down upon the rope. In two seconds I had slashed through the strands, and the flaccid machine lifted and bore us from their ken. But I see their faces yet, as

in *basso relievo*: round-eyed, open-mouthed; honest country faces, and boyish, every one; an awkward squad of recruits at drill, fronting a red-headed sergeant; the sergeant, with cane held horizontally across and behind his thighs, his face upturned with the rest, and "Irishman" on every feature of it. And so the vision fled, and Byfield's language claimed attention. The man took the whole vocabulary of British profanity at a rush, and swore himself to a standstill. As he paused for second wind I struck in:

"Mr. Byfield, you open the wrong valve. We drift, as you say, towards—nay, over the open sea. As master of this balloon, I suggest that we descend within reasonable distance of the brig yonder; which, as I make out, is backing her sails; which, again, can only mean that she observes us and is preparing to lower a boat."

He saw the sense of this, and turned to business, though with a snarl. As a gull from the cliff, the *Lunardi* slanted downwards, and passing the brig by less than a cable's length to leeward, soused into the sea.

"I say 'soused': for I confess that the shock belied the promise of our easy descent. The *Lunardi* floated: but it also drove before the wind. And as it dragged the car after it like a tilted pail, the four drenched and blinded aeronauts struggled through the spray and gripped the hoop, the netting—nay, dug their nails into the oiled silk. In its new element the machine became inspired with a sudden infernal malice. It sank like a pillow if we tried to climb it; it rolled us over in the brine; it allowed us no moment for a backward glance. I spied a small cutter-rigged craft tacking towards us, a mile and more to leeward, and wondered if the captain of the brig had left our rescue to it. He had not. I heard a shout behind us; a rattle of oars as the bowmen shipped them; and a hand gripped my collar. So one by one we were plucked—uncommon specimens!—from the deep; rescued from what Mr. Sheepshanks a minute later, as he sat on a thwart and wiped his spectacles, justly termed "a predicament, sir, as disconcerting as any my experience supplies."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

CAPTAIN COLENSO.

"BUT what be us to do with the balloon, sir?" the coxswain demanded.

Had it been my affair, I believe I should have obeyed a ridiculous impulse and begged them to keep it for their trouble; so weary was I of the machine. Byfield, however, directed them to slit a seam of the oiled silk and cut away the car, which was by this time wholly submerged and not to be lifted. At once the *Lunardi* collapsed and became manageable; and having roped it to a ring-bolt astern, the crew fell to their oars.

My teeth were chattering. These operations of salvage had taken time, and it took us a further unconscionable time to cover the distance between us and the brig as she lay hove-to, her maintopsail aback and her head-sails drawing.

"Feels like towing a whale, sir," the oarsman behind me panted.

I whipped round. The voice—yes, and the face—were the voice and face of the seaman who sat and steered us: the voice English, of a sort; the face of no pattern that I recognised for English. The fellows were as like as the two drovers Sim and Candlish had been: you might put them both at forty; grizzled men, pursed about the eyes with seafaring. And now that I came to look, the three rowers forward, though mere lads, repeated their elders' features and build; the

gaunt frame, the long, serious face, the swarthy complexion and meditative eye—in short, Don Quixote of la Mancha at various stages of growth. Men and lads, I remarked, wore silver earrings.

I was speculating on this likeness when we shipped oars and fell alongside the brig's ladder. At the head of it my hand was taken, and I was helped on deck with ceremony by a tall man in loose blue jacket and duck trowsers: an old man, bent and frail; by his air of dignity, the master of the vessel, and by his features as clearly the patriarch of the family. He lifted his cap and addressed us with a fine but (as I now recall it) somewhat tired courtesy.

"An awkward adventure, gentlemen"

We thanked him in proper form.

"I am pleased to have been of service. The pilot cutter yonder could hardly have fetched you in less than twenty minutes. I have signalled her alongside, and she will convey you back to Falmouth; none the worse, I hope, for your wetting."

"A convenience," said I, "of which my friends will gladly avail themselves. For my part, I do not propose to return."

He paused, weighing my words; obviously puzzled, but politely anxious to understand. His eyes were grey and honest, even childishly honest, but dulled about the rim of the iris and a trifle vacant, as though the world with its train of affairs had passed beyond his active concern. I keep my own eyes about me when I travel, and have surprised just such a look, before now, behind the spectacles of very old men who sit by the roadside and break stones for a living.

"I fear, sir, that I do not take you precisely."

"Why," said I, "if I may guess, this is one of the famous Falmouth packets?"

"As to that, sir, you are right, and yet wrong. She *was* a packet, and (if I may say it) a famous one." His gaze travelled aloft, and descending rested on mine with a sort of gentle resignation. "But the old pennon is down, as you see. At present she sails on a private adventure, and under private commission."

"A privateer?"

"You may call it that."

"The adventure hits my humour even more nicely. Accept me, Captain——"

"Colenso."

"Accept me, Captain Colenso, for your passenger: I will not say comrade-in-arms—naval warfare being so far beyond my knowledge, which it would perhaps be more descriptive to call ignorance. But I can pay——" I thrust a hand nervously into my breast pocket, and blessed Flora for her waterproof bag. "Excuse me, Captain, if I speak with my friend here in private for a moment."

I drew Byfield aside. "Your notes? The salt water——"

"You see," said he, "I am a martyr to acidity of the stomach."

"Man! do I invite the confidence of your stomach?"

"Consequently I never make an ascension unaccompanied by a small bottle of Epsom salts, tightly corked."

"And you threw away the salts and substituted the notes?—that was clever of you, Byfield."

I lifted my voice. "And Mr. Dalmahoy, I presume, returns to his sorrowing folk?"

The extravagant cheerfully corrected me. "They will not sorrow: but I shall return to them. Of their grudging pension I have eighteenpence in my pocket.

But I propose to travel with Sheepshanks, and raise the wind by showing his tricks. He shall toss the caber from Land's End to Forthside, cheered by the applauds of the intervening taverns and furthered by their bounty."

"A progress which we must try to expedite, if only out of regard for Mrs. Sheepshanks." I turned to Captain Colenso again. "Well, sir, will you accept me for your passenger?"

"I doubt that you are joking, sir."

"And I swear to you that I am not."

He hesitated; tottered to the companion, and called down, "Susannah! Susannah! A moment on deck, if you please. One of these gentlemen wishes to ship as passenger."

A dark-browed woman of middle age thrust her head above the ladder and eyed me. Even so might a ruminating cow gaze over her hedge upon some posting wayfarer.

"What's he dressed in?" she demanded abruptly.

"Madam, it was intended for a ball-suit."

"You will do no dancing here, young man."

"My dear lady, I accept that and every condition you may impose. Whatever the discipline of the ship——"

She cut me short. "Have you told him, father?"

"Why, no. You see, sir, I ought to tell you that this is not an ordinary voyage."

"Nor, for that matter, is mine."

"You will be exposed to risks."

"In a privateer that goes without saying."

"The risk of capture."

"Naturally: though a brave captain will not dwell on it." And I bowed.

"But I do dwell on it," he answered earnestly, a red spot showing on either cheek. "I must tell you, sir, that we are very likely indeed to fall into an enemy's hands."

"Say certain," chimed in Susannah.

"Yes, I will say we are certain. I cannot in conscience do less." He sought his daughter's eyes. She nodded.

"Oh, damn your conscience!" thought I, my stomach rising in contempt for this noble-looking but extremely faint-hearted privateersman. "Come," I said, rallying him, "we fall in with a Frenchman, or—let us suppose—an American: that is our object, eh?"

"Yes, with an American. That is our object, to be sure."

"Then I warrant we give a good account of ourselves. Tut, tut, man—an ex-packet captain!"

I pulled up in sheer wonder at the lunacy of our dispute and the side he was forcing me to take. Here was I haranguing a grey-headed veteran on his own quarter-deck and exhorting him to valour! In a flash I saw myself befooled, tricked into playing the patronising amateur, complacently posturing for the derision of gods and men. And Captain Colenso, who aimed but to be rid of me, was laughing in his sleeve, no doubt. In a minute even Sheepshanks would catch the jest. Now, I do mortally hate to be laughed at: it may be disciplinary for most men, but it turns me obstinate.

Captain Colenso, at any rate, dissembled his mirth to perfection. The look which he shifted from me to Susannah and back was eloquent of senile indecision.

"I cannot explain to you, sir. The consequences—I might mitigate them for you—still you must risk them." He broke off and appealed to me. "I would rather you did not insist: I would indeed! I must beg of you, sir, not to press it."

"But I do press it," I answered, stubborn as a mule. "I tell you that I am ready to accept all risks. But if you want me to return with my friends in the cutter, you must summon your crew to pitch me down the ladder. And there's the end on't."

"Dear, dear! Tell me at least, sir, that you are an unmarried man."

"Up to now I have that misfortune." I aimed a bow at Mistress Susannah: but that lady had turned her broad shoulders, and it missed fire. "Which reminds me," I continued, "to ask for the favour of pen, ink and paper. I wish to send a letter ashore, to the mail."

She invited me to follow her; and I descended to the main cabin, a spick-and-span apartment, where we surprised two passably good-looking damsels at their housework, the one polishing a mahogany swing-table, the other a brass door-handle. They picked up their cloths, dropped me a curtsy apiece, and disappeared at a word from Susannah, who bade me be seated at the swing-table, and set writing materials before me. The room was lit by a broad stem-window, and lined along two of its sides with mahogany doors leading, as I supposed, to sleeping cabins: the panels—not to speak of the brass handles and finger-plates—shining so that a man might have seen his face in them, to shave by. "But why all these women, on board a privateer?" thought I, as I tried a quill on my thumb-nail and embarked upon my first love-letter.

"Dearest,—This line with my devotion to tell you that the balloon has descended safely, and your Anne finds himself on board . . .

"By the way, Miss Susannah, what is the name of this ship?"

"She is called the *Lady Nepean*; and I am a married woman and the mother of six."

"I felicitate you, madam." I bowed, and resumed my writing:—

" . . . the *Lady Nepean* packet, outward bound from Falmouth to . . .

—"Excuse me, but where the dickens are we bound for?"

"For the coast of Massachusetts, I believe."

"You believe?"

She nodded. "Young man, if you'll take my advice, you'll go back."

"Madam," I answered, on a sudden impulse, "I am an escaped French prisoner." And with that, having tossed my cap over the mills (as they say), I leaned back in the settee, and we regarded each other.

"—escaped," I continued, still with my eyes on hers, "with a trifle of money, but minus my heart. I write this to the fair daughter of Britain who has it in her keeping. And now what have you to say?"

"Ah, well," she mused, "the Lord's ways be past finding out. It may be the easier for you."

Apparently it was the habit of this ship's company to speak in enigmas. I caught up my pen again:—

" . . . the coast of Massachusetts, in the United States of America, whence I hope to make my way in good time to France. Though you have news, dearest, I fear none can reach me for a while. Yet, and though you have no more to write than 'I love you, Anne,' write it, and commit it to Mr. Robbie, who will forward it to Mr. Romaine, who in turn may find a means to get it smuggled through to Paris, Rue du Foulard 16.

It should be consigned to the widow Jupille, 'to be called for by the corporal who praised her *en blanc*.' She will remember; and in truth a man who had the courage to praise it deserves remembrance as singular among the levies of France. Should a youth of the name of Rowley present himself before you, you may trust his fidelity absolutely, his sagacity not at all. And so (since the boat waits to take this) I kiss the name of Flora, and subscribe myself—until I come to claim her, and afterwards to eternity—her *prisoner*,
ANNE."

I had, in fact, a second reason for abbreviating this letter and sealing it in a hurry. The movements of the brig, though slight, were perceptible, and in the close air of the main cabin my head already began to swim. I hastened on deck in time to shake hands with my companions and confide the letter to Byfield with instructions for posting it. "And if your share in our adventure should come into public question," said I, "you must apply to a Major Chevenix, now quartered in Edinburgh Castle, who has a fair inkling of the facts, and as a man of honour will not decline to assist you. You have Dalmahoy, too, to back your assertion that you knew me only as Mr. Ducie." Upon Dalmahoy I pressed a note for his and Mr. Sheepshanks' travelling expenses. "My dear fellow," he protested, "I couldn't *dream* . . . if you are sure it won't inconvenience . . . merely as a loan . . . and deuced handsome of you, I will say." He kept the cutter waiting while he drew up an I.O.U., in which I figured as Bursar and Almoner (*honoris causa*) to the Senatus Academicus of Cramond-on-Almond. Mr. Sheepshanks meanwhile shook hands with me impressively. "It has been a memorable experience, sir. I shall have much to tell my wife on my return."

It occurred to me as probable that the lady would have even more to say to him. He stepped into the cutter, and, as they pushed off, was hilariously bonneted by Mr. Dalmahoy, by way of parting salute. "Starboard after braces!" Captain Colenso called to his crew. The yards were trimmed and the *Lady Nepean* slowly gathered way, while I stood by the bulwarks gazing after my friends and attempting to persuade myself that the fresh air was doing me good.

Captain Colenso perceived my queasiness, and advised me to seek my berth and lie down; and on my replying with haggard defiance, took my arm gently, as if I had been a wilful child, and led me below. I passed beyond one of the mahogany doors leading from the main cabin; and in that seclusion I ask you to leave me face to face with the next forty-eight hours. It was a dreadful time.

Nor at the end of it did gaiety wait on a partially recovered appetite. The ladies of the ship nursed me, and tickled my palate with the lightest of sea diet. The men strowed seats for me on deck, and touched their caps with respectful sympathy. One and all were indefatigably kind, but taciturn to a degree beyond belief. A fog of mystery hung and deepened about them and the *Lady Nepean*, and I crept about the deck in a continuous evil dream, entangling myself in impossible theories. To begin with, there were eight women on board; a number not to be reconciled with serious privateering; all daughters or sons' wives or granddaughters of Captain Colenso. Of the men—twenty-three in all—those who were not called Colenso were called Pengelly; the most of them convicted landmen by their bilious countenances and unhandy movements; men fresh from the plough-tail by their gait, yet with no ruddy impress of field-work and the open air.

Twice every day, and thrice on Sundays, this extraordinary company gathered bare-headed to the poop for a religious service which it would be colourless to call frantic. It began decorously enough, with a quavering exposition of some portion of Holy Writ by Captain Colenso. But by-and-by (and especially at the evening office) his listeners kindled and opened on him with a skirmishing fire of "Amens."

Then, worked by degrees to an ecstasy, they broke into cries of thanksgiving and mutual encouragement; they jostled for the rostrum (a long nine-pounder swivel); and then speaker after speaker declaimed his soul's experiences until his voice cracked, while the others sobbed, exhorted, even leapt in the air. "Stronger, brother!" "'Tis working, 'tis working!" "O deliverance!" "O streams of redemption!" For ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour maybe, the ship was a Babel, a Bedlam. And then the tumult would die down as suddenly as it had arisen; and, dismissed by the old man, the crew, with faces once more inscrutable, but twitching with spent emotion, scattered to their usual tasks.

Five minutes after these singular outbreaks it was difficult to believe in them. Captain Colenso paced the quarter-deck once more with his customary shuffle, his hands beneath his coat-tails, his eyes conning the ship with their usual air of mild abstraction. Now and again he paused to instruct one of his incapables in the trimming of a brace, or to correct the tie of a knot. He never scolded; seldom lifted his voice. By his manner of speech, and the ease of his authority, he and his family might have belonged to separate ranks of life. Yet I seemed to detect method in their obedience. The veriest fumbler went about his work with a concentrated gravity of bearing, as if he fulfilled a remoter purpose, and understood it while he tied his knots into "grannies," and generally mismanaged the job in hand.

Towards the middle of our second week out, we fell in with a storm—a rotatory affair, and soon over by reason that we struck the outer fringe of it; but to a landsman sufficiently daunting while it lasted. Late in the afternoon I thrust my head up for a look around. We were weltering along in horrible forty-foot seas, over which our bulwarks tilted at times until from the companion hatchway I stared plumb into the grey sliding chasms, and felt like a fly on the wall. The *Lady Nepean* hurled her old timbers along under close-reefed maintopsail, and a rag of a foresail only. The captain had housed topgallant masts and lashed his guns inboard; yet she rolled so that you would not have trusted a cat on her storm-washed decks. They were desolate but for the captain and helmsman on the poop; the helmsman, a mere lad—the one, in fact, who had pulled the bow-oar to our rescue—lashed and gripping the spokes pluckily, but with a white face which told that, though his eyes were strained on the binnacle, his mind ran on the infernal seas astern. Over him, in sea-boots and oilskins, towered Captain Colenso—rejuvenated, transfigured; his body swaying easily to every lurch and plunge of the brig, his face entirely composed and cheerful, his salt-rimmed eyes contracted a little, but alert and even boyishly bright. An heroic figure of a man!

My heart warmed to Captain Colenso; and next morning, as we bowled forward again with a temperate breeze on our beam, I took occasion to compliment him on the *Lady Nepean's* behaviour.

"Ay," said he abstractedly; "the old girl made pretty good weather of it."

"I suppose we were never in what you would call real danger?"

He faced me with sudden earnestness. "Mr. Ducie, I have served the Lord all my days, and He will not sink the ship that carries my honour." Giving me no time to puzzle over this, he changed his tone. "You'll scarce believe it, but in her young days she had a very fair turn of speed."

"Her business surely demands it still," said I. Only an arrant landsman could have reconciled the lumbering old craft with any idea of privateering; but this was my only theory, and I clung to it.

"We shall not need to test her."

"You rely on your guns, then?" I had observed the care lavished on these. They were of brass, and shone like the door-plates in the main cabin.

"Why, as to that," he answered evasively, "I've had to before now. The last voyage I commanded her—it was just after the war broke out with America—we fell in with a schooner off the Banks; we were outward bound for Halifax. She carried twelve nine-pounder carronades and two long nines, beside a big fellow on a traverse; and we had the guns you see—eight nine-pounders and one chaser of the same calibre—post-office guns, we call them. But we beat her off after two hours of it."

"And saved the mails?"

He rose abruptly (we had seated ourselves on a couple of hen-coops under the break of the poop). "You will excuse me. I have an order to give"; and he hurried up the steps to the quarter-deck.

It must have been ten days after this that he stopped me in one of my eternal listless promenades, and invited me to sit beside him again.

"I wish to take your opinion, Mr. Ducie. You have not, I believe, found salvation? You are not one of us, as I may say?"

"Meaning by 'us'?"

"I and mine, sir, are unworthy followers of the Word, as preached by John Wesley."

"Why, no; that is not my religion."

"But you are a gentleman." I bowed. "And on a point of honour—do you think, sir, that as a servant of the King one should obey his earthly master even to doing what conscience forbids?"

"That might depend——"

"But on a point of honour, sir? Suppose that you had pledged your private word in a just, nay, a generous bargain, and were commanded to break it. Is there anything could override that?"

I thought of my poor old French colonel and his broken *parole*, and was silent. "Can you not tell me the circumstances?" I suggested at length.

He had been watching me eagerly. But he shook his head now, sighed, and drew a small Bible from his pocket. "I am not a gentleman, sir. I laid it before the Lord: but," he continued naïvely, "I wanted to learn how a gentleman would look at it." He searched for a text, turning the pages with long, nervous fingers; but desisted with another sigh, and, a moment later, was summoned away to solve some difficulty with the ship's reckoning.

My respect for the captain had been steadily growing. He was so amiable, too, so untiringly courteous; he bore his sorrow—whatever the cause might be—with so gentle a resignation; that I caught myself pitying even while I cursed him and his crew for their inhuman reticence.

But my respect vanished pretty quickly next day. We were seated at dinner in the main cabin—the captain at the head of the table, and, as usual, crumbling his biscuit in a sort of waking trance—when Mr. Reuben Colenso, his eldest son and acting mate, put his solemn face in at the door with news of a sail about four miles distant on the lee bow. I followed the captain on deck. The stranger, a schooner, had been lying-to when first descried in the hazy weather; but was standing now to intercept us. At two miles distance—it being then about two o'clock—I saw that she hoisted British colours.

"But that flag was never sewn in England," Captain Colenso observed, studying her through his glass. His cheeks, usually of that pallid ivory colour proper to old age, were flushed with a faint carmine, and I observed a suppressed excitement

in all his crew. For my part, I expected no better than to play target in the coming engagement: but it surprised me that he served out no cutlasses, ordered up no powder from the hold, and in short took no single step to clear the *Lady Nepean* for action or put his men in fighting trim. The most of them were gathered about the fore-hatch, to the total neglect of their guns, which they had been cleaning assiduously all the morning. On we stood without shifting our course by a point, and were almost within range when the schooner ran up the stars-and-stripes and plumped a round shot ahead of us by way of hint.

I stared at Captain Colenso. Could he mean to surrender without one blow? He had exchanged his glass for a speaking trumpet, and waited, fumbling with it, his face twitching painfully. A cold dishonouring suspicion gripped me. The man was here to betray his flag. I glanced aloft: the British ensign flew at the peak. And as I turned my head, I felt rather than saw the flash, heard the shattering din as the puzzled American luffed up and let fly across our bows with a raking broadside. Doubtless she, too, took note of our defiant ensign, and leaped to the nearest guess, that we meant to run her aboard.

Now, whether my glance awoke Captain Colenso, or this was left to the all but simultaneous voice of the guns, I know not. But as their smoke rolled between us I saw him drop his trumpet and run with a crazed face to the taffrail, where the halliards led. The traitor had forgotten to haul down his flag!

It was too late. While he fumbled with the halliards, a storm of musketry burst and swept the quarter-deck. He flung up both hands, spun round upon his heel, and pitched backwards at the helmsman's feet; and the loosened ensign dropped slowly and fell across him, as if to cover his shame.

Instantly the firing ceased. I stood there between compassion and disgust, willing yet loathing to touch the pitiful corpse, when a woman—Susannah—ran screaming by me and fell on her knees beside it. I saw a trickle of blood ooze beneath the scarlet folds of the flag. It crawled along the plank, hesitated at a seam, and grew there to an oddly shaped pool. I watched it. In shape I thought it remarkably like the map of Ireland. And I became aware that some one was speaking to me, and looked up to find a lean and lantern-jawed American come aboard and standing at my shoulder.

"Are you anywise hard of hearing, stranger? Or must I repeat to you that this licks cockfighting?"

"I, at any rate, am not disputing it, sir."

"The *Lady Nepean*, too! Is that the Capen yonder? I thought as much. Dead, hey? Well, he'd better *stay* dead, though I'd have enjoyed the inside o' five minutes' talk, just to find out what he did it for."

"Did what?"

"Why, brought the *Lady Nepean* into these waters, and Commodore Rodgers no further away than Rhode Island, by all accounts. He must have had a nerve. And what post might *you* be holding on this all-fired packet? Darn *me*, but you have females enough on board!" For indeed there were three poor creatures kneeling now and crooning over the dead captain. The men had surrendered—they had no arms to fling down—and were collected in the waist, under guard of a cordon of Yankees. One lay senseless on deck, and two or three were bleeding from splinter wounds: for the enemy, her freeboard being lower by a foot or two than the wall sides of the *Lady Nepean*, had done little execution on deck, whatever the wounds in our hull might be.

"I beg your pardon, Captain——"

"Seccombe, sir, is my name. Alpheus Q. Seccombe, of the *Manhattan* schooner."

"Well, then, Captain Seccombe, I am a passenger on board this ship, and know neither her business here nor why she has behaved in a fashion that makes me blush for her flag—which, by the way, I have every reason to abominate."

"Oh, come now! You're trying it on. It's a yard-arm matter, and I don't blame you, to be sure. Capen sank the mails?"

"There were none to sink, I believe."

He conned me curiously.

"You don't look like a Britisher, either?"

"I trust not. I am the Viscount Anne de Kërroual de St-Yves, escaped from a British war-prison."

"Lucky for you if you prove it. We'll get to the bottom of this." He faced about and called, "Who's the first officer of this brig?"

Reuben Colenso was allowed to step forward. Blood from a scalp-wound had run and caked on his right cheek, but he stepped squarely enough.

"Bring him below," Captain Seccombe commanded. "And you, Mr. What's-your-name, lead the way. It's one or the other of us will get the hang of this affair."

He seated himself at the head of the table in the main cabin, and spat ceremoniously on the floor.

"Now, sir: you are, or were, first officer of this brig?"

The prisoner, standing between his two guards, gripped his stocking cap nervously. "Will you please to tell me, sir, if my father is killed?"

"Seth, my lad, I want room." One of the guards, a strapping youngster, stepped and flung open a pane of the stern window. Captain Seccombe spat out of it with nonchalant dexterity before answering:

"I guess he is. Brig's name?"

"The *Lady Nepean*."

"Mail packet?"

"Yes, sir; leastways——"

"Now see here, Mister First Officer Colenso junior: it's a shortish trip between this and the yard-arm, and it may save you some superfluous lying if I tell you that in August, last year, the *Lady Nepean* packet, Captain Colenso, outward bound for Halifax, met the *Hitchcock* privateer off the Great Bank of Newfoundland, and beat her off after two hours' fighting. You were on board of her?"

"I tended the stern gun."

"*Very* good. The next day, being still off the Banks, she fell in with Commodore Rodgers, of the United States frigate *President*, and surrendered to him right away."

"We sank the mails."

"You did, my man. Notwithstanding which, that lion-hearted hero treated you with the forbearance of a true-born son of freedom." Captain Seccombe's voice took an oratorical roll. "He saw that you were bleeding from your fray. He fed you at his hospitable board; he would not suffer you to be de-nuded of the least trifle. Nay, what did he promise?—but to send your father and his crew and passengers back to England in their own ship, on their swearing, upon their sacred honour, that she should return to Boston harbour with an equal number of American prisoners from England. Your father swore to that upon the Old and New Testaments, severally and conjointly; and the *Lady Nepean* sailed home for all the world like a lamb from the wolf's jaws with a single American officer inside of her. And how did your dog-damned Government receive this noble confidence? In a way, sir, that would have brought a blush to the cheek of a low-down attorney's clerk. They re-pudiated. Under shelter of a notification that

no exchange of prisoners on the high seas would count as valid, this perjured tyrant and his myrmidons went back on their captain's oath, and kept the brig; and the American officer came home empty-handed. Your father was told to resume his duties, immortal souls being cheap in a country where they press seamen's bodies. And now, Mister First Officer Colenso, perhaps you'll explain how he had the impudence to come within two hundred miles of a coast where his name smelt worse than vermin."

"He was coming back, sir."

"Hey?"

"Back to Boston, sir. You see, Cap'n, father wasn't a rich man, but he had saved a trifle. He didn't go back to the service, though told that he might. It preyed on his mind. We was all very fond of father; being all one family, as you might say, though some of us had wives and families, and some were over to Redruth, to the mines."

"Stick to the point."

"But this *is* the point, Capen. He was coming back, you see. The *Lady Nepean* wasn't fit for much after the handling she'd had. She was going for twelve hundred pounds: the Post Office didn't look for more. We got her for eleven hundred, with the guns, and the repairs may have cost a hundred and fifty: but you'll find the account books in the cupboard there. Father had a matter of five hundred laid by, and a little over."

Captain Seccombe removed his legs from the cabin-table, tilted his chair forward and half rose in his seat.

"You *bought* her?"

"That's what I'm telling you, sir: though father 'd have put it much clearer. You see, he laid it before the Lord; and then he laid it before all of us. It preyed on his mind. My sister Susannah stood up and she said, 'I reckon I'm the most respectably married of all of you, having a farm of my own; but we can sell up, and all the world's a home to them that fears the Lord. We can't stock up with American prisoners, but we can go ourselves instead; and, judging by the prisoners I've a-seen brought in, Commodore Rodgers 'll be glad to take us. What he does to us is the Lord's affair.' That's what she said, sir. Of course we kept it quiet: we put it about that the *Lady Nepean* was for Canada, and the whole family going out for emigrants. This here gentleman we picked up outside Falmouth; perhaps he've told you."

Captain Seccombe stared at me, and I at Captain Seccombe. Reuben Colenso stood wringing his cap.

At length the American found breath enough to whistle. "I'll have to put back to Boston about this, though it's money out of pocket. This here's a matter for Commodore Bainbridge. Take a seat, Mr. Colenso."

"I was going to ask," said the prisoner simply, "if, before you put me in irons, I might go on deck and look at father. It'll be only a moment, sir."

"Yes, sir, you may. And if you can get the ladies to excuse me, I will follow in a few minutes. I wish to pay him my respects. It's my opinion," he added pensively, as the prisoner left the cabin,— "It's my opinion the man's story is genu-wine."

He repeated the word, five minutes later, as we stood on the quarter-deck beside the body. "A genu-wine man, sir, unless I am mistaken."

Well, the question is one for casuists. In my travels I have learnt this, that men are greater than governments; wiser sometimes, honester always. Heaven deliver me from any such problem as killed this old packet-captain!

Between loyalty to his king and loyalty to his conscience he had to choose, and it is likely enough that he erred. But I believe that he fought it out, and found on his country's side a limit of shame to which he could not stoop. A man so placed, perhaps, may even betray his country to her honour. In this hope at least the flag which he had hauled down covered his body still as we committed it to the sea, its service or disservice done.

Two days later we anchored in the great harbour at Boston, where Captain Seccombe went with his story and his prisoners to Commodore Bainbridge, who kept them pending news of Commodore Rodgers. They were sent, a few weeks later, to Newport, Rhode Island, to be interrogated by that commander; and, to the honour of the Republic, were released on a liberal *parole*; but whether, when the war ended, they returned to England or took oath as American citizens, I have not learnt. I was luckier. The Commodore allowed Captain Seccombe to detain me while the French consul made inquiry into my story; and during the two months which the consul thought fit to take over it, I was a guest in the captain's house. And here I made my bow to Miss Amelia Seccombe, an accomplished young lady, "who," said her doting father, "has acquired a considerable proficiency in French, and will be glad to swap ideas with you in that language." Miss Seccombe and I did not hold our communications in French; and, observing her disposition to substitute the warmer language of the glances, I took the bull by the horns, told her my secret, and rhapsodised on Flora. Consequently no Nausicaa figures in this Odyssey of mine. Nay, the excellent girl flung herself into my cause, and bombarded her father and the consular office with such effect that on February 2nd, 1814, I waved farewell to her from the deck of the barque *Shawmut*, bound from Boston to Bordeaux.

Written by

A. T. QUILLER COUCH,

after Robert Louis Stevenson's notes.



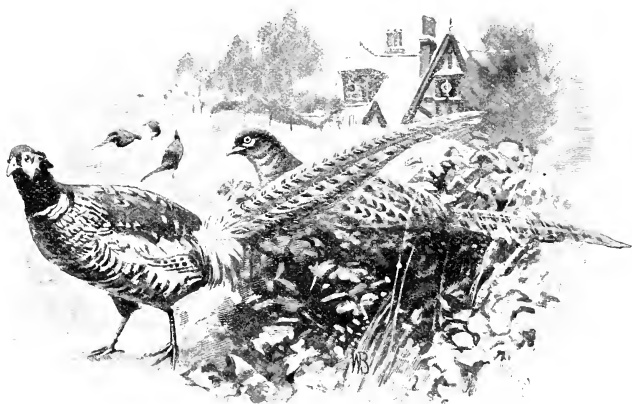
no two are alike. Some rise at the edge of the wood, and go rocketing up at an angle of forty-five degrees ; others, rising two hundred yards back, come swooping downwards with set wings ; some curl to the right, some curl to the left, and some drift about aimlessly on the strong head-wind that makes the shooting so infinitely harder. For, in quick shooting, mere pace is a trifling difficulty beside uncertainty of flight.

So, for twenty minutes or more, the sport rolls on at tip-top pressure, while the irritable gun in the centre stamps his foot impatiently and objurgates his loader's slowness. And the poor loader, with purple face and aching wrists, struggles frantically to push the cartridges in wrong end in front ; and the ladies smile sweetly, and pretend not to hear certain words that polite society knoweth not.

And then, at length, the last doomed bird has flown his course, and the guns stretch themselves and sigh, and gaze thoughtfully at the piles of cartridges lying at their feet, and wonder what percentage has been fired in vain.

So we will leave them ; while the small boys scramble for the brass cartridges, and the beaters gather up the fallen from the wood behind.

ERNEST HAMILTON.





THE ADVENTURES OF A FRENCH PRISONER IN ENGLAND.

CHAPTER XXXV.

IN PARIS: ALAIN PLAYS HIS LAST CARD.

ON March 10th, at sunset, the *Shawmut* passed the Pointe de Grave fort and entered the mouth of the Gironde, and at eleven o'clock next morning dropped anchor a little below Blaye, under the guns of the *Regulus*, 74. We were just in time, a British fleet being daily expected there, to co-operate with the Duc d'Angoulême and Count Lynch, who was then preparing to pull the tricolour from his shoulder and betray Bordeaux to Beresford, or, if you prefer it, to the Bourbon. News of his purpose had already travelled down to Blaye: and therefore no sooner were my feet once more on the soil of my beloved France than I turned them towards Libourne, or rather, Fronsac; and, the morning after my arrival there, started for the capital.

But so desperately were the joints of travel dislocated (the war having depleted the country alike of cattle and able-bodied drivers), and so frequent were the breakdowns by the way, that I might as expeditiously have trudged it. It cost me fifteen good days to reach Orleans; and at Étampes (which I reached on the morning of the 30th) the driver of the tottering *diligence* flatly declined to proceed. The Cossacks and Prussians were at the gates of Paris. "Last night we could see the fires of their bivouacs. If Monsieur listens he can hear the firing." The Empress had fled from the Tuileries. "Whither?" The driver, the *aubergiste*, the disinterested crowd, shrugged their shoulders. "To Rambouillet probably. God knew what was happening, or would happen." The Emperor was at Troyes, or at Sens, or else as near as Fontainebleau: nobody knew for certain which. But the fugitives from Paris had been pouring in for days; and not a cart or four-footed beast was to be hired for love or money, though I hunted Étampes for hours.

At length, and at nightfall, I ran against a bow-kneed grey mare, and a *cabriolet de place* which, by its label, belonged to Paris; the pair wandering the street under

what it would be flattery to call the guidance of an eminently drunken driver. I boarded him. He dissolved at once into maudlin tears and prolixity. It appeared that on the 29th he had brought over a *bourgeois* family from the capital, and had spent the past three days in perambulating Étampes and the past three nights in crapulous slumber within his vehicle. Here was my chance, and I demanded to know if for a price he would drive me back with him to Paris.

He declared, still weeping, that he was fit for anything. "For my part, I am ready to die, and Monsieur knows that we shall never reach."

"Still, anything is better than Étampes."

For some inscrutable reason this struck him as excessively comic. He assured me that I was a brave fellow, and bade me jump up at once. Within five minutes we were jolting towards Paris. Our progress was all but inappreciable, for the grey mare had come to the end of her powers; and her master's monologue kept pace with her. His anecdotes were all of the past three days. The iron of Étampes apparently had entered his soul and effaced all memory of his antecedent career. Of the war, of any recent public events, he could tell me nothing.

I had half expected—supposing the Emperor to be near Fontainebleau—to happen on his *vedettes*; but we had the road to ourselves, and reached Longjumeau a little before daybreak, without having encountered a living creature. Here we knocked up the proprietor of a *cabaret*, who assured us, between yawns, that we were going to our doom; and after baiting the grey and dosing ourselves with execrable brandy, pushed forward again. As the sky grew pale about us, I had my ears alert for the sound of artillery. But Paris kept silence. We passed Sceaux, and arrived at length at Montrouge and the barrier. It was open, abandoned—not a sentry, not a *douanier* visible.

"Where will Monsieur be pleased to descend?" my driver inquired; and added, with an effort of memory, that he had a wife and two adorable children on a top floor in the Rue du Mont Parnasse and stabled his mare handy by. I paid him, and watched him from the deserted pavement as he drove away. A small child came running from a doorway behind me, and blundered against my legs. I caught him by the collar and demanded what had happened to Paris. "That I do not know," said the child, "but mamma is dressing herself to take me to the Review. *Tenez!*"—he pointed; and at the head of the long street I saw advancing the front rank of a blue-coated regiment of Prussians, marching across Paris to take up position on the Orleans road.

The murder was out. I had entered Paris from the south just in time, if I wished, to witness the entry of his Majesty the Emperor Alexander from the north. Soon I found myself one of a crowd converging towards the bridges to scatter northward along the line of his Majesty's progress, from the Barrière de Pantin to the Champs Elysées, where the grand review was to be held. I chose this for my objective; and, making my way along the Quays, found myself, shortly before ten o'clock, in the Place de la Concorde, where a singular little scene brought me to a halt.

About a score of young men—aristocrats by their dress and carriage—were gathered about the centre of the square. Each wore a white scarf and the Bourbon cockade in his hat; and their leader, a weedy youth with hay-coloured hair, had drawn a paper from his pocket, and was declaiming its contents at the top of a voice by several sizes too big for him:—

"For Paris is reserved the privilege, under circumstances now existing, to accelerate the dawn of Universal Peace. Her suffrage is awaited with the interest which so immense a result naturally inspires. . . ."

et cætera. Later on I possessed myself of a copy of the Prince of Schwarzenberg's proclamation, and identified the wooden rhetoric at once—

"Parisians, you have the example of Bordeaux before you . . ."

Ay, by the Lord, they had—right under their eyes! The hay-coloured youth wound up his reading with a "*Vive le roi!*" and his band of walking gentlemen took up the shout. The crowd looked on impassive; one or two edged away; and a grey-haired soldierly horseman (whom I recognised for the Duc de Choiseul-Praslin) passing in full *tenue* of Colonel of the National Guard, reined up and addressed the young men in a few words of grave rebuke. Two or three answered by snapping their fingers and repeating their "*Vive le roi!*" with a kind of embarrassed defiance. But their performance, before so chilling an audience, was falling sadly flat, when a dozen or more of young royalist bloods came riding up to reanimate it—among them M. Louie de Chateaubriand, M. Talleyrand's brother, Archambaut de Perigord, the scoundrelly Marquis de Maubreuil—yes—and my cousin, the Vicomte de Kérour de Saint-Yves!

The cynical and naked impudence of it took me like a buffet. There, in a group of strangers, my cheek reddened under it, and for the moment I had a mind to run. I had done better to run. By a chance his eye missed mine as he swaggered past at a canter, for all the world like a *tenore robusto* on horseback, with the rouge on his face and his air of expansive Olympian blackguardism. He carried a laced white handkerchief at the end of his riding-switch; and this was bad enough. But as he wheeled his bay thoroughbred, I saw that he had followed the *déclassé* Maubreuil's example and decorated the brute's tail with a Cross of the Legion of Honour. That brought my teeth together, and I stood my ground. "*Vive le roi!*" "*Vivent les Bourbons!*" "*À bas le sabot corse!*" Maubreuil had brought a basketful of white *brassards* and cockades, and the gallant horsemen began to ride about and press these upon the unresponsive crowd. Alain held one of the badges at arm's length as he pushed into the little group about me, and our eyes met.

"*Merçi!*" said I: "*retenez-le jusqu'à ce que nous nous rencontrons—rue Grégoire de Tours.*"

His arm, with the riding-switch and laced handkerchief, went up as though he had been stung. Before it could descend I darted aside, deep into the crowd which hustled around him, understanding nothing, but none the less sullenly hostile. "*À bas les cocardes blanches!*" cried one or two. "Who was the cur?" I heard Maubreuil's question as he pressed in to the rescue; and Alain's reply, "*Peste!*" A young relative of mine who is in a hurry to lose his head: whereas I prefer to choose the time for that."

I took this for a splutter of hatred, and even found it laughable as I made my escape good. At the same time our encounter had put me out of humour for gaping at the review, and I turned back and recrossed the river, to seek the Rue du Fouarre and the widow Jupille.

Now, the Rue du Fouarre, though once a very famous thoroughfare, is to-day perhaps as squalid as any that drains its refuse by a single gutter into the Seine; and the widow had been no beauty even in the days when she followed the 106th of the line as *vivandière* and before she wedded Sergeant Jupille of that regiment. But she and I had struck up a friendship over a flesh-wound which I received in an affair of outposts on the Algueda; and thenceforward I taught myself to soften the edge of her white wine by the remembered virtue of her ointment; so that when Sergeant Jupille was cut off by a grapeshot in front of

Salamanca, and his Philomène retired to take charge of his mother's wineshop in the Rue du Fouarre, she had enrolled my name high on the list of her prospective patrons. I felt myself, so to speak, a part of the good-will of the house; and "Heaven knows," thought I, as I threaded the insalubrious street, "it is something to-day for a soldier of the Empire to count even on this much in Paris." *Est aliquid, quocunque loco, quocunque sacello*—

Madame Jupille knew me at once, and we fell (figuratively speaking) upon each other's neck. Her shop was empty: the whole quarter had trooped off to the review. After mingling our tears (again figuratively) over the fickleness of the capital, I inquired if she had any letters for me.

"Why, no, comrade."

"None?" I exclaimed, with a very blank face.

"Not one." Madame Jupille eyed me archly, and relented. "The reason being that Mademoiselle is too discreet."

"Ah!" I heaved a big sigh of relief. "You provoking woman, tell me what you mean by that."

"Well, now, it may have been ten days ago that a stranger called in, and asked if I had any news of the corporal who praised my white wine. 'Have I any news,' said I, 'of a needle in a bundle of hay? They *all* praise it.' (Oh, Madame Jupille!) 'The corporal I'm speaking of,' said he, 'is, or was, called Champdivers.' '*Has!*' I cried: 'you are not going to tell me that he's dead!' And I declare to you, comrade, the tears came into my eyes. 'No, he is not,' said the stranger; 'and the best proof is that he will be here inquiring for letters before long. You are to tell him that if he expects one from—see, I took the name down on a scrap of paper and stuck it in the wineglass here—from Miss Flora Gilchrist, he will do well to wait in Paris until a friend finds opportunity to deliver it by hand. And if he ask more about me, say that I come from—*tenez*, I wrote the second name underneath—yes, that is it—Mr. Romaine.'"

"Confound his caution!" said I. "What sort of man was this messenger?"

"Oh, a staid-looking man, dark, and civil-spoken. You might call him an upper servant, or perhaps a notary's clerk: very plainly dressed, in black."

"He spoke French?"

"*Parfaitement*. What else?"

"And he has not called again?"

"To be sure, yes—the day before yesterday; and seemed quite disappointed. 'Is there anything monsieur would like to add to his message?' I asked. 'No,' said he; 'or stay—tell him that all goes well in the north, but he must not leave Paris until I see him.'"

You may guess how I cursed Mr. Romaine for this beating about the bush. If all went well in the north, what possible excuse of caution could the man have for holding back Flora's letter? And how, in any case, could it compromise me here, in Paris? I had half a mind to take the bit in my teeth and post off at once for Calais. Still, there was the plain injunction, and the lawyer doubtless had a reason for it hidden somewhere behind his tiresome circumambulatory approaches. And his messenger might be back at any hour.

Therefore, though it went against the grain, I thought it prudent to take lodgings with Madame Jupille and possess my soul in patience. You will say that it should not have been difficult to kill time in Paris between March 31st and April 5th, 1814. The entry of the Allies, Marmont's great betrayal, the Emperor's abdication; the Cossacks in the streets, the newspaper offices at work like hives under their new editors, and buzzing contradictory news from morning to

night; a new rumour at every café, a scuffle, or the makings of one, at every street corner, and hour by hour a steady stream of manifestoes, placards, handbills, caricatures, and broad-sheets of opprobrious verse,—the din of it all went by me like the vain noises of a dream, as I trod the pavements, intent upon my own hopes and perplexities. I cannot think that this was mere selfishness. Rather, a deep disgust was weaning me from my country. If this Paris indeed were the reality, then was I the phantasm, the *revenant*; then was France—the France for which I had fought and my parents gone to the scaffold—a land that had never been, and our patriotism the shadow of a shade. Judge me not too hardly if in the restless, aimless perambulations of those five days I crossed the bridge between the country that held neither kin nor friends for me, but only my ineffectual past, and the country wherein one human creature, if only one, had use for my devotion.

On the sixth day—that is, April 5th—my patience broke down. I took my resolution over lunch and a bottle of Beaujolais, and walked straight back from the restaurant to my lodgings, when I asked Madame Jupille for pen, ink and paper, and sat down to advertise Mr. Romaine that, for good or ill, he might expect me in London within twenty-four hours of the receipt of this letter.

I had scarce composed the first sentence when there came a knock at the door, and Madame Jupille announced that two gentlemen desired to see me. "Show them up," said I, laying down my pen with a leaping heart: and in the doorway, a moment later, stood—my cousin Alain.

He was alone. He glanced with a grin of comprehension from me to the letter, advanced, set his hat on the table beside it, and his gloves (after blowing into them) beside his hat.

"My cousin," said he, "you show astonishing agility from time to time; but on the whole you are damned easy to hunt."

I had risen. "I take it you have pressing business to speak of, since amid your latest political occupations you have been at pains to seek me out. If so, I will ask you to be brief."

"No pains at all," he corrected affably. "I have known all the time that you were here. In fact, I expected you some while before you arrived; and sent my man, Paul, with a message."

"A message?"

"Certainly: touching a letter from the fair Flora. You received it?—the message, I mean?"

"Then it was not——"

"No, decidedly it was not Mr. Romaine: to whom"—with another glance at the letter—"I perceive you are writing for explanations. And since you are preparing to ask how on earth I traced you to this rather unsavoury den, permit me to inform you that 'a b' spells 'ab,' and that Bow Street, when on the track of a criminal, does not neglect to open his correspondence."

I felt my hand tremble as it gripped the top-rail of my chair; but I managed to command the voice to answer, coldly enough,—

"One moment, Monsieur le Vicomte, before I do myself the pleasure of pitching you out of window. You have detained me these five days in Paris; and have done so, you give me to understand, by the simple expedient of a lie. So far, so good. Will you do me the favour to complete the interesting self-exposure, and inform me of your reasons?"

"With all the pleasure in life. My plans were not ready—a little detail wanting, that is all. It is now supplied." He took a chair, seated himself at the table,

and drew a folded paper from his breast-pocket. "It will be news to you, perhaps, that our uncle—our lamented uncle, if you choose—is dead these three weeks."

"Rest his soul!"

"Forgive me if I stop short of that pious hope." Alain hesitated, let his venom get the better of him, and spat out an obscene curse on his uncle's memory, which only betrayed the essential weakness of the man. Recovering himself, he went on: "I need not recall to you a certain scene (I confess too theatrical for my taste) arranged by the lawyer at his bedside; nor need I help you to an inkling of the contents of his last will. But possibly it may have slipped your memory that I gave Romaine fair warning. I promised him that I would raise the question of undue influence, and that I had my witnesses ready. I have added to them since; but I own to you that my case will be the stronger when you have obligingly signed the paper which I have the honour to submit to you." And he tossed it, unopened, across the table.

I picked it up and unfolded it.

"I, the Viscount Anne de K roual de Saint Yves, formerly serving under the name of Champdivers in the Bonapartist army, and later, under that name, a prisoner of war in the Castle of Edinburgh, hereby state that I had neither knowledge of my uncle, the Count de K roual de Saint-Yves, nor expectations from him, nor was owned by him, until sought out by Mr. Daniel Romaine in the Castle of Edinburgh, by him supplied with money to expedite my escape, and by him clandestinely smuggled at nightfall into Amersham Place. Further, that until that evening I had never set eyes on my uncle, nor have set eyes on him since: that he was bed-ridden when I saw him, and apparently in the last stage of senile decay. And I have reason to believe that Mr. Romaine did not fully inform him of the circumstances of my escape, and particularly of my concern in the death of a fellow-prisoner named Goguelat, formerly a *mar chal des logis* in the 22nd regiment of the line—"

Of the contents of this precious document let a sample suffice. From end to end it was a tissue of distorted statements, implicated with dishonouring suggestions. I read it through and let it drop on the table.

"I beg your pardon," said I, "but what do you wish me to do with it?"

"Sign it," said he.

I laughed. "Once more I beg your pardon; but, though you have apparently dressed for it, this is not comic opera."

"Nevertheless you will sign."

"Oh, you weary me!" I seated myself and flung a leg over the arm of my chair. "Shall we come to the alternative?—for I assume you have one."

"The alternative? To be sure!" he answered cheerfully. "I have a companion below—one Clausel; and, at the *T te d'Or*, a little up the street, an escort of police."

Here was a pleasing predicament! But if Alain had started with a chance of daunting me (which I do not admit), he had spoilt it long since by working on the raw of my temper. I kept a steady eye on him, and considered; and the longer I considered the better assured was I that his game must have a disastrously weak point somewhere, which it was my business to find.

"You have reminded me of your warning to Mr. Romaine. The subject is an ugly one for two of one family to touch upon, but do you happen to recall Mr. Romaine's counter-threat?"

"Bluff, my young sir! It served his purpose for the moment, I grant you. I was unbinged: the indignity, the very monstrosity of it, the baselessness, staggered reason——"

"It was baseless, then?"

"The best proof is that, in spite of his threat and my open contempt and disregard of it, Mr. Romaine has not stirred a hand."

"You mean that my uncle destroyed the evidence?"

"I mean nothing of the kind," he retorted hotly; "for I deny that any such evidence at any time existed."

I kept my eye on him. "Alain," I said quietly, "you are a liar."

A flush darkened his face beneath its cosmetics, and with an oath he dipped finger and thumb into his waistcoat pocket and pulled out a dog-whistle. "No more of that," said he, "or I whistle up the police, this minute."

"Well, well: let us resume the discussion. You say this man Clausel has denounced me?"

He nodded.

"Soldiers of the Empire are cheap in Paris, just now."

"So cheap that public opinion would be content if all the *messieurs* Champdivers were to kill all the *messieurs* Goguelat, and be shot or guillotined for it. I forget which your case demands, and doubt if public opinion would inquire."

"And yet," I mused, "there must be preliminaries: some form of trial, for instance; with witnesses. It is even possible that I might be found innocent."

"I have allowed for that unlikely chance, and I look beyond it. To be frank it does not strike me as probable that a British jury will hand over the estates of the Comte de K  roual de Saint-Yves to an escaped Bonapartist prisoner who has stood his trial for the murder of his comrade, and received the benefit of the doubt."

"Allow me," said I, "to open the window an inch or two. No: put back your whistle. I do not propose to fling you out—at least, not just yet; nor will I try to escape. To tell you the truth, you suggest the need of a little fresh air. And now, Monsieur, you assure me you hold the knave in your hand. Well, then, play him. Before I tear your foolish paper up, let us have a look at your confederate." I stepped to the door and called down the stairs, "Madame Jupille, be so good as to ask my other visitor to ascend."

With that I turned to the window again, and stood there looking out upon the foul gutter along which the refuse of some dye-works at the head of the street found its way down to the Seine. And, standing so, I heard the expected footstep mounting the stairs.

"I must ask your pardon, Messieurs, for this intrusion."

"Hey?" If the words had been a charge of shot fired into my back, I could not have spun round on them more suddenly. "Mr. Romaine!"

For indeed it was he, and not Clausel, who stood in the doorway. And to this day I do not know if Alain or I stared at him with the blanker bewilderment. Though I believe there was a significant difference in our complexions.

"M. the Viscount," said Romaine, advancing, "recently effected an exchange I have taken the liberty to effect another, and have left Mr. Clausel below listening to some arguments which are being addressed to him by Mr. Dudgeon, my confidential clerk. I think I may promise"—with a chuckle—"they will prove effectual. By your faces, gentlemen, I see that you regard my appearance as something in the nature of a miracle. Yet M. the Viscount, at least, should be guessing by this time that it is the simplest, most natural affair in the world. I engaged my word, sir, to have you watched. Will it be set down to more than ordinary astuteness that, finding you in negotiations for the exchange of the prisoner Clausel, we kept an eye upon him also?—that we followed him to Dover,

and, though unfortunate in missing the boat, reached Paris in time to watch the pair of you leave your lodgings this morning?—nay, that, knowing whither you were bound, we reached the Rue du Fouarre in time to watch you making your dispositions? But I run on too fast. Mr. Anne, I am entrusted with a letter for you. When, with Mr. Alain's permission, you have read it, we will resume our little conversation."

He handed me the letter and walked to the fireplace, where he took snuff copiously while Alain eyed him like a mastiff about to spring. I broke open my letter and stooped to pick up a small enclosure which fell from it.

"MY DEAREST ANNE,—When your letter came and put life into me again, I sat down in my happiness and wrote you one that I shall never allow you to see: for it makes me wonder at myself. But when I took it to Mr. Robbie, he asked to see your letter; and when I showed him the *wrapper*, declared that it had been tampered with, and if I wrote and told you what we were doing for you it might only make your enemies the wiser. For we have done something; and this (which is *purely* a *business* letter) is to tell you that the credit does not all belong to Mr. Robbie, or to your Mr. Romaine (who by Mr. Robbie's account must be quite a tiresome old gentleman, though well-meaning, no doubt). But on the Tuesday after you left us I had a talk with Major Chevenix; and when I really felt *quite sorry* for him (though it was no use, and I *told* him so), he turned round in a way I could not but admire, and said he wished me well, and would prove it. He said the charge against you was really one for the military authorities alone; that he had reasons for feeling sure that you had been drawn into this affair *on a point of honour*, which was quite a different thing from *what they said*; and that he could not only make an affidavit or something of the kind, on his own account, but knew enough of that man Clausel to make him confess the truth. Which he did, the very next day, and made Clausel sign it, and Mr. Robbie has a copy of the man's statement, which he is sending with this to Mr. Romaine in London. And that is the reason why Rowley (who is a *dear*) has come over and is waiting in the kitchen while I write these hurried lines. He says, too, that Major Chevenix was only just in time, since Clausel's friends are managing an exchange for him, and he is going back to France. And so, in haste, I write myself

"Your sincere friend,
"FLORA."

"P.S. My aunt is well. Ronald is expecting his commission.

"P.P.S. You told me to write it, and so I must: 'I love you, Anne.'"

The enclosure was a note in a large and unformed hand, and ran:—

"DEAR MR. ANNE RESPE^{TD} SIR—This comes hoping to find you well as it leaves me at present, all is well as miss Flora will tell you that double-died Clause have confest. This is to tell you Mrs. Mac R is going on nicely bar the religion wth is only put on to any people, and being a widow who blames her. Not me. miss Flora says she will put this in with hers, and there is something else but it is a ded secret so no more at present from

"sir Y^{rs} Resp^f
"JAS. ROWLEY."

Having read these letters through, I placed them in my breast-pocket, stepped to the table, and handed Alain's document gravely back to him; then turned to Mr. Romaine, who shut his snuffbox with a snap.

"It only remains, I think," said the lawyer, "to discuss the terms which (merely as a matter of generosity, or, say, for the credit of your house) can be granted to you—to Mr. Alain."

"You forget Clausel, I think," snarled my cousin.

"True: I had forgotten Clausel." Mr. Romaine stepped to the head of the stairs, and called down, "Dudgeon!"

Mr. Dudgeon appeared, and endeavoured to throw into the stiffness of his salutation a denial that he had ever waltzed with me in the moonlight.

"Where is the man Clausel?"

"I hardly know, sir, if you would place the wineshop of the *Tête d'Or* at the top or the bottom of this street. I presume the top, since the sewer runs in the other direction. At all events, Mr. Clausel disappeared, about two minutes ago, in the same direction as the sewer."

Alain sprang up, whistle in hand.

"Put it down," said Mr. Romaine. "The man was cheating you. I can only hope," he added with a sour smile, "that you paid him on account with an I.O.U."

But Alain turned at bay. "One trivial point seems to have escaped you, master Attorney; or your courage is more than I give you credit for. The English are none too popular in Paris as yet, and this is not the most scrupulous quarter. One blast on this whistle: a cry of '*Espion anglais!*' and two Englishmen——"

"Say three," Mr. Romaine interrupted, and strode to the door. "Will Mr. Burchell Fenn be good enough to step upstairs?"

And here let me cry 'halt!' There are things in this world—or that is my belief—too pitiful to be set down in writing; and of these Alain's collapse was one. It may be, too, that Mr. Romaine's British righteousness accorded rather ill with the weapon he used so unsparingly. Of Fenn I need only say that the luscious rogue shouldered through the doorway as though he had a public duty to discharge, and only the contrariness of circumstances had prevented his discharging it before. He cringed to Mr. Romaine, who held him and the whole nexus of his villainies in the hollow of his hand: he was even obsequiously eager to denounce his fellow-traitor. Under a like compulsion, he would (I feel sure) have denounced his own mother. I saw the sturdy Dudgeon's mouth working like a bull-terrier's over a shrew mouse. And between them Alain had never a chance. Not for the first time in this history I found myself all but taking sides with him, in sheer revulsion against the barbarity of the attack. It seemed it was through Fenn that Mr. Romaine had first happened on the scent: and the greater rogue had held back a part of the evidence, and would trade it now—"having been led astray"—"to any gentleman that would let bygones be bygones." And it was I at length who interposed, when my cousin was beaten to his knees, and having dismissed Mr. Burchell Fenn, restored the discussion to a businesslike footing. The end of it was that Alain renounced all his claims, and accepted a yearly pension of six thousand francs. Mr. Romaine made it a condition that he should never set foot again in England; but seeing that he would certainly be arrested for debt within twenty-four hours of his landing at Dover, I thought this unnecessary.

"A good day's work!" said the lawyer, as we stood together in the street outside. But I was silent.

"And now, Mr. Anne, if I may have the honour of your company at dinner—shall we say Tortoni's?—we will on our way step round to my hotel, the *Quatre Saisons*, behind the Hotel de Ville, and order a *calèche* and four to be in readiness.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

I GO TO CLAIM FLORA.

BEHOLD me now speeding northwards on the wings of love, ballasted by Mr. Romaine. But, indeed, that worthy man climbed into the *calèche* with something less than his habitual gravity. He was obviously and pardonably flushed with triumph. I observed that now and again he smiled to himself in the twilight, or drew in his breath and emitted it with a martial *poof*! And when he began to talk—which he did as soon as we were clear of the Saint Denis barrier—the points of the Family Lawyer were untrussed. He leaned back in the *calèche* with the air of a man who had subscribed to the peace of Europe and dined well on the top of it. He criticised the fortifications with a wave of his toothpick, and discoursed derisively and at large on the Emperor's abdication, on the treachery of the Duke of Ragusa, on the prospects of the Bourbons, and on the character of M. Talleyrand, with anecdotes which made up in raciness for what they lacked in authenticity.

We were bowling through La Chapelle when he pulled out his snuffbox and proffered it.

"You are silent, Mr. Anne."

"I was waiting for the chorus," said I. "Rule Britannia! Britannia rules the waves: and Britons never, never, never—Come, out with it!"

"Well," he retorted, "and I hope the tune will come natural to you before long."

"Oh, give me time, my dear sir! I have seen the Cossacks enter Paris, and the Parisians decorate their poodles with the Cross of the Legion of Honour. I have seen them hoist a wretch on the Vendôme column to smite the bronze face of the man of Austerlitz. I have seen the *salle* of the Opera rise to applaud a blatant fat fellow singing the praises of the Prussian—and to the tune of *Vive Henri Quatre*! I have seen, in my cousin Alain, of what the best blood in France is capable. Also I have seen peasant boys—unripe crops of the later levies—mown down by grapeshot, raise themselves on their elbows to cheer for France and the little man in grey. In time, Mr. Romaine, no doubt my memory will confuse these lads with their betters, and their mothers with the ladies of the *salle de l'Opéra*: just as in time, no doubt, I shall find myself Justice of the Peace and Deputy-Lieutenant of the shire of Buckingham. I am changing my country, as you remind me: and, on my faith, she has no place for me. But for the sake of her I have explored—and found the best of her—in my new country's prisons; and, I repeat, you must give me time."

"Tut, tut!" was his comment, as I searched for tinder-box and sulphur match to relight my cigar. "We must get you into Parliament, Mr. Anne. You have the gift."

As we approached Saint Denis the flow of his discourse sensibly slackened; and, a little beyond, he pulled his travelling-cap over his ears and settled down to slumber. I sat wide awake beside him. The spring night had a touch of chill in it, and the breath of our horses streaming back upon the lamps of the *calèche* kept a constant nimbus between me and the postilions. Above it, and over the black spires of the poplar avenues, the regiments of stars moved in parade. My gaze went up to the ensign of their noiseless evolutions, to the pole-star, and to Cassiopeia swinging beneath it, low in the north, over my Flora's pillow—my pole-star and journey's end.

Under this soothing reflection I composed myself to slumber; and awoke, to my surprise and annoyance, in a miserable flutter of the nerves. And this fretfulness increased with the hours, so that from Amiens to the coast Mr. Romaine must have had the devil of a time with me. I bolted my meals at the way-houses, chafing all the while at the business of the relays. I popped up and down in the *calèche* like a shot on a hot shovel. I cursed our pace. I girded at the lawyer's snuffbox, and could have called him out upon Calais sands, when we reached them, to justify his vile methodical use of it. By good fortune we arrived to find the packet ready with her warps, and bundled ourselves on board in a hurry. We sought separate cabins for the night; and in mine, as in a sort of moral bath, the drastic cross-seas of the Channel cleansed me of my irritable humour, and left me like a rag, beaten and hung on a clothes-line to the winds of heaven.

In the grey of the morning we disembarked at Dover; and here Mr. Romaine had prepared a surprise for me. For as we drew to the shore and the throng of porters and waterside loafers, on what should my gaze alight but the beaming countenance of Mr. Rowley! I declare it communicated a roseate flush to the pallid cliffs of Albion. I could have fallen on his neck. On his side the honest lad kept touching his hat and grinning in a speechless ecstasy. As he confessed to me later, "It was either hold my tongue, sir, or call for three cheers!" He snatched my valise and ushered us through the crowd to our hotel and breakfast. And it seemed he must have filled up his time at Dover with trumpeting of our importance: for the landlord welcomed us on the *perron*, obsequiously cringing; we entered in a respectful hush that might have flattered his Grace of Wellington himself; and the waiters, I believe, would have gone on all fours but for the difficulty of reconciling that posture with efficient service. I knew myself at last for a Personage—a great English landowner; and did my best to command the mien proper to that tremendous class when, the meal despatched, we passed out between the bowing ranks to the door, where our chaise stood ready.

"But hullo!" said I at sight of it, and my eye sought Rowley's.

"Begging your pardon, sir, but I took it on myself to order the colour, and hoping it wasn't a liberty."

"Claret and invisible green—a *replica*, but for a bullet-hole wanting."

"Which I didn't like to go so far on my own hook, Mr. Anne."

"We fight under the old colours, my lad."

"And walk in and win this time, sir, strike me lucky!"

While we howled along the first stage towards London—Mr. Romaine and I within the chaise, and Rowley perched upon the dickey—I told the lawyer of our anabasis from Aylesbury to Kirkby-Lonsdale. He took snuff.

"*Forsitan et hæc olim*,—that Rowley of yours seems a good-hearted lad, and less of a fool than he looks. The next time I have to travel post with an impatient lover, I'll take a leaf out of his book and buy me a flageolet."

"Sir, it was ungrateful of me——"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Anne! I was fresh from my little triumph, that is all; and perhaps would have felt the better for a word of approbation—a little pat on the back, as I may say. It is not often that I have felt the need of it—twice or thrice in my life, perhaps: not often enough to justify my anticipating your example and seeking a wife betimes: for that is a man's one chance if he wants another to taste his success."

"And yet I dare swear you rejoice in mine unselfishly enough."

"Why, no, sir. Your cousin would have sent me to the right-about within a week of his succession. Still I own to you that he offended something at least as

deep as self-interest: the sight and scent of him habitually turned my gorge. Whereas"—and he inclined to me with a dry smile—"your unwisdom at least was amiable, and—in short, sir, though you can be infernally provoking, it has been a pleasure to serve you."

You may be sure that this did not lessen my contrition. We reached London late that night; and here Mr. Romaine took leave of us. Business waited for him at Amersham Place. After a few hours' sleep Rowley woke me to choose between two post-boys in blue jackets and white hats and two in buff jackets and black hats who were competing for the honour of conveying us as far as Barnet; and having decided in favour of the blue and white, and solaced the buff and black with a *pourboire*, we pushed forward once more.

We were now upon the Great North Road, along which the York mail rolled its steady ten miles an hour to the wafted music of the guard's bugle: a rate of speed which, to the more Dorian mood of Mr. Rowley's flageolet, I proposed to better by one-fifth. But first, having restored the lad to his old seat beside me, I must cross-question him upon his adventures in Edinburgh, and the latest news of Flora and her aunt, Mr. Robbie, Mrs. McRankine, and the rest of my friends. It came out that Mr. Rowley's surrender to my dear girl had been both instantaneous and complete. "She *is* a floorer, Mr. Anne. I suppose now, sir, you'll be standing up for that knock-me-down kind of thing?"

"Explain yourself, my lad."

"Beg your pardon, sir, what they call love at first sight." He wore an ingenuous blush and an expression at once shy and insinuating.

"The poets, Rowley, are on my side."

"Mrs. McRankine, sir——"

"The Queen of Navarre, Mr. Rowley——"

But he so far forgot himself as to interrupt. "It took Mrs. McRankine years, sir, to get used to her first husband. She told me so."

"It took us some days, I remember, to get used to Mrs. McRankine. To be sure, her cooking——"

"That's what I say, Mr. Anne: it's more than skin-deep; and you'll hardly believe me, sir—that is, if you didn't take note of it—but she hev got an ankle."

He had produced the pieces of his flageolet and was adjusting them nervously, with a face red as a turkey-cock's wattles. I regarded him with a new and incredulous amusement. That I served Mr. Rowley for a glass of fashion and a mould of form was of course no new discovery; and the traditions of body-service allow, nay, enjoin, that when the gentleman goes a-wooing, the valet shall take a sympathetic wound. What, too, could be more natural than that a gentleman of sixteen should select a lady of fifty for his first essay in the tender passion? Still—Bethiah McRankine!

I kept my countenance with an effort. "Mr. Rowley," said I, "if music be the food of love, play on." And Mr. Rowley played "The Girl I left behind me," shyly at first, but anon with terrific expression. He broke off with a sigh: "Heigho!" in fact, said Rowley; and started off again while I tapped out the time, and hummed:—

"But now I'm bound for Brighton camp:

Kind Heaven, then, pray guide me,

And send me safely back again

To the Girl I left behind me."

Thenceforward that not uninspiring air became the *motif* of our progress. We never tired of it. Whenever our conversation flagged, by tacit consent, Mr. Rowley

pieced his flageolet together and started it. The horses lifted it out in their gallop; the harness jingled, the postilions tittupped to it. And the *presto* with which it wound up as we came to a post-house and a fresh relay of horses had to be heard to be believed.

So, with the chaise-windows open to the vigorous airs of spring, and my own breast a window flung wide to youth and health and happy expectations, I rattled homewards; impatient as a lover should be, yet not too impatient to taste the humour of spinning like a lord, with a pocketful of money, along the road which the *gi-devant* M. Champdivers had so fearfully dodged and skirted in Burchell Fenn's covered cart.

And yet so impatient that, when we galloped over the Calton Hill, and down into Edinburgh by the new London road, with the wind in our faces, and a sense of April in it, brisk and jolly, I must pack off Rowley to our lodgings with the valises, and stay only for a wash and breakfast at Dumbreck's before posting on to Swanston alone.

"Whene'er my steps return that way,
Still faithful shall she find me,
And never more again I'll stray
From the Girl I left behind me."

Where the gables of the Cottage rose into view over the hill's shoulder, I dismissed my driver and walked forward, whistling the tune; but fell silent as I came under the lee of the garden wall, and sought for the exact spot of my old escalade. I found it by the wide beechen branches over the road, and hoisted myself noiselessly up to the coping, where as before they screened me—or would have screened me had I cared to wait.

But I did not care to wait; and why? Because, not fifteen yards from me, *she* stood!—she, my Flora, my goddess, bare-headed, swept by chequers of morning sunshine and green shadows, with the dew on her sandal-shoes, and the lap of her morning gown appropriately heaped with flowers—with tulips, scarlet, yellow and striped. And confronting her, with his back towards me, and a remembered patch between the armholes of his stable-waistcoat, Robie the gardener rested both hands on his spade and expostulated.

"But I like to pick my tulips, leaves and all, Robie!"

"Aweel, Miss; it's clean ruin' the bulbs, that's all I say to you."

And that was all I waited to hear. As he bent over and resumed his digging I shook a branch of the beech with both hands, and set it swaying. She heard the rustle and glanced up, and, spying me, uttered a gasping little cry.

"What ails ye, Miss?" Robie straightened himself *instantly*: but she had whipped right-about-face, and was gazing towards the kitchen garden.

"Isn't that a child among the arti—the strawberry beds, I mean?"

He cast down his spade and ran. She turned; let the tulips fall at her feet, and ah! her second cry of gladness, and her heavenly blush as she stretched out both arms to me! It was all happening over again—with the difference that now my arms too were stretched out—

"Journey's end in lovers' meeting
Every wise man's son doth know . . ."

Robie had run a dozen yards, perhaps, when either the noise I made in scrambling off the wall, or some recollection of having been served in this way before, brought him to a halt. At any rate he turned round, and just in time to witness our embrace.

"The good Lord behear!" he exclaimed, stood stock still for a moment, and waddled off at top speed towards the back door.

"We must tell Aunt at once! She will—— Why, Anne, where are you going?" She caught my sleeve.

"To the hen-house, to be sure," said I.

A moment later, with peals of happy laughter, we had taken hands and were running along the garden alleys towards the house. And I remember, as we ran, finding it somewhat singular that this should be the first time I had ever invaded Swanston Cottage by way of the front door.

We came upon Mrs. Gilchrist in the breakfast-room. A pile of linen lay on the horsehair sofa, and the good lady, with a measuring tape in one hand and a pair of scissors in the other, was walking around Ronald, who stood on the hearthrug in a very manly attitude. She regarded me over her gold-rimmed spectacles, and shifting the scissors into her left hand, held out her right.

"H'm," said she, "I give ye good morning, Moshah. And what might you be wanting of me this time?"

"Madam," I answered, "that, I hope, is fairly evident."

Ronald came forward. "I congratulate you, Saint-Yves, with all my heart. And you can congratulate me: I have my commission."

"Nay, then," said I, "let me rather congratulate France that the war is over. Seriously, my dear fellow, I wish you joy. What's the regiment?"

"The 4-th."

"Chevenix's."

"Chevenix is a decent fellow. He has behaved very well—indeed he has."

"Very well indeed," said Flora, nodding her head.

"He has the knack. But if you expect me to like him any the better for it——"

"Major Chevenix," put in Mrs. Gilchrist in her most Rhadamantine voice, "always sets me in mind of a pair of scissors." She opened and shut the pair in her hand, and I had to confess that the stiff and sawing action was admirably illustrative.

"But I wish to Heaven, madame," thought I, "you could have chosen another simile!"

In the evening of that beautiful day I walked back to Edinburgh by some aerial and rose-clouded path not indicated on the maps. It led somehow to my lodgings, and my feet touched earth when the door was opened to me by Bethiah McRankine.

"But where is Rowley?" I asked, a moment later, looking around my sitting-room.

Mrs. McRankine smiled sardonically. "Him? He came back rolling his eyes, so that I guessed him to be troubled wi' the wind. And he's in bed this hour past with a spoonful of peppermint in his little wame."

And here I may ring down the curtain upon the adventures of Anne de Saint Yves.

Flora and I were married early in June, and had been settled for a little over six months amid the splendours of Amersham Place, when news came of the Emperor's escape from Elba. Throughout the consequent alarms and excursions of the Hundred Days (as M. de Chambord named them for us) I have to confess that the Vicomte Anne sat still and warmed his hands at the domestic hearth. To be sure, Napoleon had been my master, and I had no love for the *cocarde blanche*. But here was I, an Englishman already, in legal but inaccurate phrase,

a "naturalised" one, having, as Mr. Romaine put it, a stake in the country, not to speak of a growing interest in its game-laws and the local administration of justice. In short, here was a situation to tickle a casuist. It did not, I may say, tickle me in the least, but played the mischief with my peace. If you, my friends, having weighed the *pro* and *contra*, would have counselled inaction, possibly, allowing for the *hébétéude de foyer* and the fact that Flora was soon to become a mother, you might have predicted it. At any rate I sat still and read the newspapers; and on the top of them came a letter from Ronald announcing that the 4-th had their marching, or rather their sailing, orders, and that within a week his boat would rock by the pier of Leith to convey him and his comrades to join the Duke of Wellington's forces in the Low Countries. Forthwith nothing would suit my dear girl but we must post to Edinburgh to bid him farewell—in a chariot, this time, with a box-seat for her maid and Mr. Rowley. We reached Swanston in time for Ronald to spend the eve of his departure with us at the Cottage; and very gallant the boy looked in his scarlet uniform, which he wore for the ladies' benefit, and which (God forgive us men!) they properly bedewed with their tears.

Early next morning we drove over to the city, and drew up in the thick of the crowd gathered at the foot of the Castle Hill to see the 4-th march out. We had waited half an hour, perhaps, when we heard two thumps of a drum, and the first notes of the regimental quick-step sounded within the walls; the sentry at the outer gate stepped back and presented arms, and the ponderous archway grew bright with the red coats and brazen instruments of the band. The farewells on their side had been said; and the inexorable *tramp, tramp* upon the drawbridge was the burthen of their answer to the waving handkerchiefs, the huzzas of the citizens, the cries of the women. On they came, and in the first rank, behind the band, rode Major Chevenix. He saw us, flushed a little, and gravely saluted. I never liked the man; but will admit he made a fine figure there. And I pitied him a little; for while his eyes rested on Flora, hers wandered to the rear of the third company, where Ensign Ronald Gilchrist marched beside the tattered colours, with chin held up and a high colour on his young cheeks, and a lip that quivered as he passed us.

"God bless you, Ronald!"

"Left wheel!"—The band and the Major riding behind it swung round the corner into North Bridge Street; the rear rank and the adjutant behind it passed up the Lawn Market. Our driver was touching up his horses to follow, when Flora's hand stole into mine. And I turned from my own conflicting thoughts to comfort her.

Written by

A. T. QUILLER COUCH,

after Robert Louis Stevenson's notes.

THE END.

